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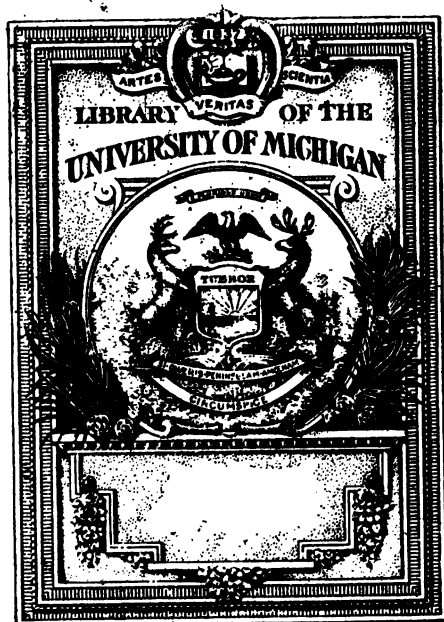
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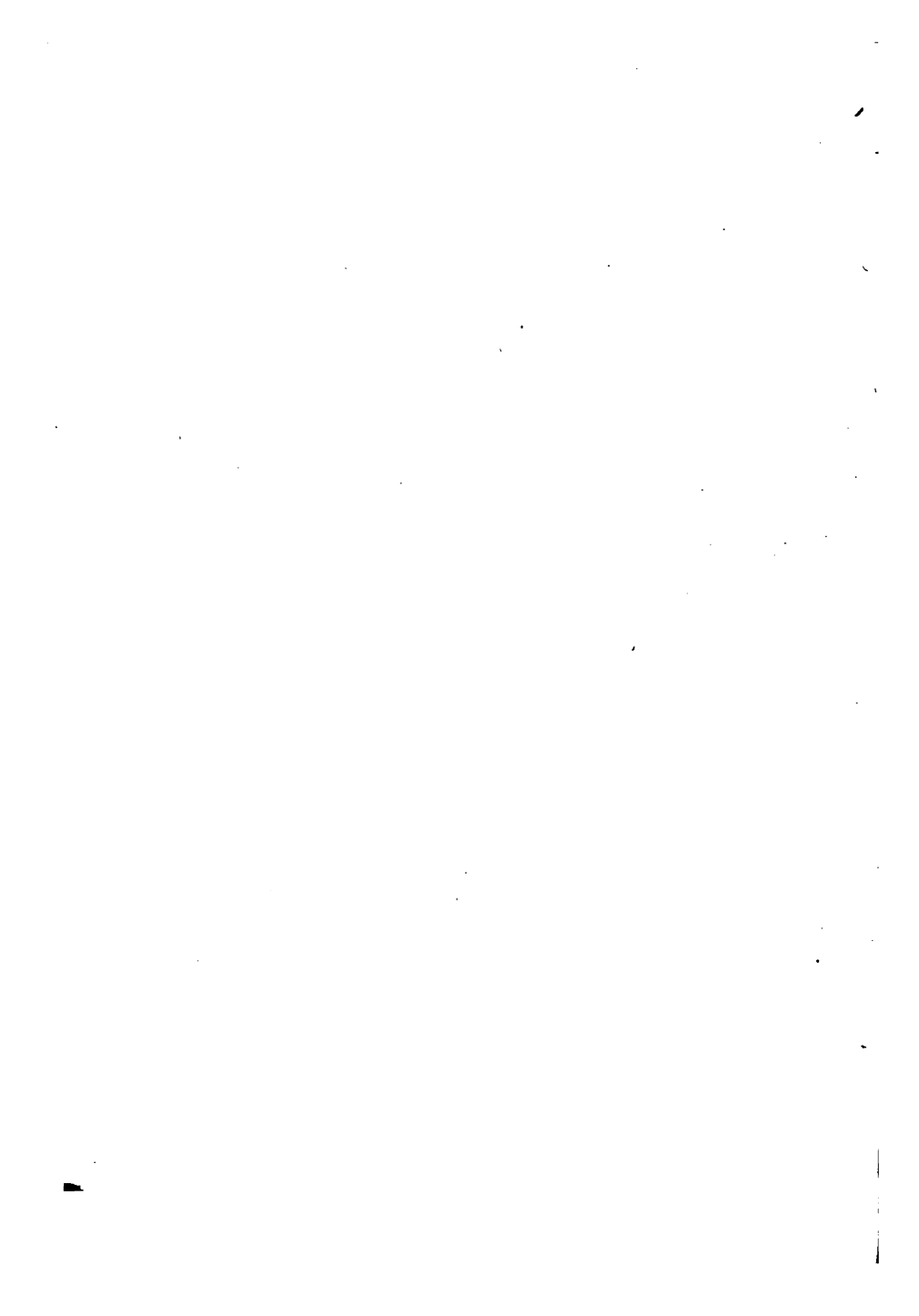
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SHORT SERMONS
FROM
'A LAYMAN'S LEGACY'



SHORT SERMONS

FROM

A Layman's Legacy



BY

SAMUEL GREG, 1804-1876.

' Though dead, he yet speaketh '

London

PHILIP GREEN, 6, ESSEX STREET, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE twelve Sermons by the late Samuel Greg contained in this volume are taken from the second edition of *A Layman's Legacy*, published in 1883 and now out of print. The sermons were delivered to a small congregation in Macclesfield, chiefly composed of working men, during the years 1864 to 1874. Personal friends, and others who had been attracted by the sincere and tender Christian piety of the author, urged the desirability of issuing a selection of these discourses in a form and at a price which would ensure a wider circulation than was possible for the larger work.

Samuel Greg was born September 6th, 1804, and died after a prolonged illness, May 14th, 1876. He was the elder brother of William Rathbone Greg, the author of *The Creed of Christendom*, and other well-known works. After a careful education at Nottingham and Bristol, he commenced business as a mill-owner, but ill-health, and disappointments and worries in the cotton trade, soon led to his retirement. His illness began in 1847 and lasted, with only occasional intervals free from pain, until his death. After his withdrawal from business, he occupied himself with various schemes for the elevation of the labouring classes, in preparing occasional lectures for working-men, writing short poems, and in correspondence with many loved friends. In 1854 he published, for the use of Sunday schools, a delightful volume entitled *Scenes from the Life of Jesus*, also out of print. The story of his life is told with great

simplicity and tenderness in the *Memoir* prefixed to *A Layman's Legacy*.

The late Dean Stanley said of Samuel Greg that he combined 'a sincere trust in the Divine Goodness with a sincere attachment to truth and freedom and progress,' and that he had 'rarely met with a man so profoundly penetrated with the true sentiment of religious veneration.' Dr. Martineau, who had been his school-fellow at Bristol, wrote of him: 'a purer aspiration for truth, a readier devotion to all clear right, a simpler trust in a divine light hid within every cloud, I do not believe was ever found in a human soul.'

The religious utterances of a man, of whom such words as these were spoken by such competent judges, cannot fail to bring inspiration and guidance to anxious, weary hearts and lives.

W. C. B.

London, *June*, 1895.

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SAMUEL GREG

‘His whole nature sighed for a religion which, like the true word of Christ, should sink deep and go wide; and while he was absolutely faithful to his personal convictions, his heart went out towards every promise of a gospel co-extensive with the spiritual wants of humanity.’—JAMES MARTINEAU.

ANGELS.

'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.'—

MATTHEW xxi. 9.

IT was a bright spring morning. The sun was shining in his early glory straight down upon the wide-spread city and the mountains that stand round about Jerusalem. It shone upon that Mount of Olives that stands on the other side of the valley overlooking the city, and sparkled upon the quivering young leaves of the large olive trees in a certain garden that in a few days was to witness a scene whose record would be handed down to the remotest ages. There is a road winding over the shoulder of the Mount of Olives that leads from Bethany to Jerusalem, and that road was just now thronged with a great multitude of people moving on slowly towards the city. In their midst you might distinguish above the rest, seated upon an ass, a noble form, towards whom all around seemed to turn and look as the centre of interest. He seemed to be gazing mournfully at the city as it lay there in its beauty before him, with the pinnacles and towers of the great Temple glittering in the sunlight right opposite to him, and the long lines of the city walls cresting the steep ascent, and within them the flat-roofed, white-washed buildings that formed the city of Jerusalem. The multitude seemed to pause for a minute on the brow of the hill before descending to cross the brook Kedron, as they looked with one gaze of Jewish admira-

tion upon their beloved Zion. It was a supreme moment; Jesus felt it to be so. Yet, amid the Hosannas resounding now in short-lived welcome around him, and notwithstanding the heavy weight of apprehension that must have made a dark background of gloom to the exciting scene, it is characteristic of his noble and unselfish heart that his foremost thought was still of others: 'Oh, Jerusalem! Jerusalem! If thou hadst known in this thy day the things that belong to thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes.'

But the procession moves on, and winds down the steep path into the valley. And still the excited people wave their palm-branches, and still they cry aloud, 'Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!'

Here let us turn for the present from the scene we have been picturing, to apply these words of our text to our own experience and circumstances: 'He that cometh in the name of the Lord'—that is, in other words, the messenger or angel of the Lord. The word angel means a messenger. I take this passage as my text because it expresses not only the quality and credentials of the messenger, but also the spirit in which we, when any such may visit us, should receive and welcome him: 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.' I do not perhaps misapply these words when I take them from the particular occasion that called them forth, and extend their meaning to all other occasions in which there is this common similarity, that the messenger or angel comes 'in the name of the Lord.' God has a thousand messengers who 'at his bidding speed' and carry messages of mercy from heaven to earth. I would call God's angels all those beings, or those things, or those circumstances, by which God speaks to man, by which He whispers to him of heavenly things, or warns him of danger, or recalls

him from his wanderings, or shows him his sin, or opens to him glimpses of truth, or strengthens him in the way of duty, or helps him up the mountain towards the temple of the Almighty. Now, bearing this mark in mind, I want to remind you that, though there may be the beautiful, winged, superhuman beings called angels, such as the imagination of ages has always pictured, invisible to mortal sight, there are also *human* angels, who are bearing a divine message to some fellow-creature. We may truly often be angels to one another. Look at the mother, watching over her young child; shielding it from evil; showing it what is good and beautiful; lifting up its young thoughts to the knowledge of the Heavenly Father; caring for, helping, teaching it—is not that mother an angel to her child, a messenger and agent of God to its young soul?

‘Mortal mother, guard him well!
Boundless powers within him dwell;
The blessed task to you is given
To rear him for the courts of Heaven.’

And sometimes too—aye, frequently—is a child an angel to its mother. How many a mother first really approaches God *earnestly*, through her child! For him she lifts up her soul to God with a fervour she had never felt before. From his relation to her she learns her filial relation to God. The child’s dependence upon and trust in her, awaken new and holy feelings within her. Through him she learns what it is to love, to fear, to trust, to hope, to desire, to pray. Has not that child, all unknowingly, brought to her messages from the Almighty?

Again: perhaps some of you can recall a time, long ago, when some friend you loved first spoke to you of heavenly things, and led you to love what was good; or when some one kindled in your soul a desire for knowledge; or warmed your heart to the worship of

excellence ; or opened your eyes to recognize some new truth ; or helped you in some way to some measure of that life eternal which consists in knowing the true God truly. Was not the friend who did any of these things an angel to you ? Did he not bring a message from God to you ? And was not his coming 'blessed' ? Or, you were in danger of falling into some great sin, of losing yourself for ever, of sinking away out of the sight of God and man into some terrible pit of destruction. But there came the voice of a friend, or it might be of a stranger, and in some way, by kind words of affection or of warning, or by opening your eyes to see the hell that lay yawning before you, or by giving you his friendly companionship, and not leaving you to fight alone with the evil spirit that was assailing you—by all or by any of these means that messenger of Heaven came, and saved you from that sin, and set you again upon your feet, or covered, perhaps, your first transgression, and helped you to hold your place among honest and upright men, so that what you have been since you may almost say you owe to him. Was not that man an angel to you ?

Or, again, you were in sore need ; in some great crisis of your life ; hard pressed by poverty, or embarrassment, or danger, or difficulty ; for awhile you knew not where to turn for aid, and it seemed to you as if nothing but ruin and misery lay before you ; you cried earnestly to God to help you, though you could not see how, or by what unseen way, He could possibly lead you forth ; and then, when you least looked for it, there came a voice, saying, 'Be of good cheer.' Some hand, of one you perhaps knew not, was stretched out to help you ; He lifted the burden from your heart ; the hour of fear and darkness passed away ; and the sun once more shone out upon your path from among the opening clouds. Was not this also the voice and the visit of one of God's angels ?

And there are also dumb angels. Dumb ! Aye, as the stars are dumb when the heavens are telling the glory of God ; yet there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.

SORROW is one of these dumb angels, if we will make it so, if we recognize its mission, and give it the welcome, 'Blessed is he that cometh from the Lord.' And what is its message ? 'Thus saith the Lord : Thou art forgetting thine immortal destiny ; forgetting that thou art a child of God, that time is short, that eternity is before thee. I am sent to remind thee. The tares and weeds of the world are choking the good seed ; they must be torn up. The silver cords of love are binding thee very tightly to this beautiful and joyous world ; they must be loosened. Thou canst not see the bright firmament of heaven because of the glaring light of prosperity close around thee. Behold, I will make darkness, that thou mayest look upon the stars. The sounds of earthly gladness are filling thy ears, so that thou canst not hear the still voice of conscience. I will

' Make deep silence in thy heart,
For thought to do its part.'

The Lord calls thee. He would have a Sabbath day with thee.'

Thus speaks the angel Sorrow, to those who will listen to his voice, to those who can bow their heads and say, 'Blessed art thou, *even thou*, if thou comest in the name of the Lord.'

But if we do not give this welcome ; if we will not lend our ear to the heaven-sent message ; if we feel only the dark shadow of the presence of an unwelcome visitor, and spend the time of his sojourning with us in angry and rebellious wishes that he were gone,—then the blessing with which we failed to greet *him*, he does not leave with *us*. We suffer, indeed, still ; we have to

drink the cup he has brought us ; but it is all bitterness then. Our tears flow, but in vain. Our hearts bleed, in vain. We cannot, in that case, have the consolation and peace of feeling that it is indeed good for us that we have been afflicted.

Then there is PAIN, a more terrible angel still ; one whose mission is to smite, to crush, to crucify ; to make us look over the brink into the awful possibilities of human suffering. Who is he, moulded of mortal clay, who can look upon this terrible messenger, as he approaches with uplifted scourge, and, knowing what he is, say, 'Blessed art thou that comest in the name of the Lord' ? There was One who said it, and who, on that angel's wings, was upborne to the bosom of his Father. There have been followers of that One who have drunk his cup and been baptized with his baptism. Where are they now ? 'Call them from the dead, for our eyes to see,' that we may know to what heights of sublime virtue that suffering for others, or as witness to the truth, that spirit of sacrifice can lift even our humanity !

But this angel comes even to us, who are not made of martyr clay ; and he lifts his scourge, and down it comes upon our poor flesh and spirit, and we are crushed and broken, and our cry is one of agony. And thus he speaks : 'A terrible stroke, this of mine, is it not ? But thy Father sent it. Now, think of Calvary. Understand something of the sacrifice of the Cross. Open thy heart henceforth to the cry of suffering. You know now what pain is. You have gone down into the deep places of man's nature. You have eaten of the tree of knowledge, and have found it bitter. Terribly bitter, is it not—that fruit ? Henceforth thou wilt never give pain to a living creature ; no, not to a grasshopper. Thou wilt never be cruel any more, for ever !' Thus he speaks. Can we transform this terrible messenger into a true angel, by giving him the

angel's welcome, 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord'!

Then, after these dark hours and deep experiences, there comes sometimes another sort of messenger, a bright and gladsome spirit, whose name is JOY. 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who bringeth good tidings!' Ah! how easy it is *now* to give the angel welcome: 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord'!

Yes; but let us take care that he *does* come 'in the name of the Lord,' and that he does upon us the work of the Lord. This he will do if he fills our hearts with wishes to shed abroad upon our brethren the blessings of joy and gladness that he scatters upon us; if we seek to bestow and to communicate what we have received; if our hearts are softened into generous sympathy by our own happiness, and not hardened into selfishness. But it does not do God's work if it shuts up the heart, and makes us dwell with satisfaction on our own happiness only, and forget that others are not basking in the sunshine that is pouring its floods around ourselves. He who is *made* happy should *make* happy. He who is loved should love. He who has received freely should give freely.

'I ask thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching, wise,
To meet the glad with joyful smiles,
And wipe the weeping eyes;
A heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathize.'—A. L. WARING.

But Joy is an angel who comes, but does not stay. He is a bird of passage, and having dropped his short-lived blessing, he passes on, to scatter flowers and sunshine upon other homes.

Then comes another, sterner and stronger; rousing, and not gentle. He appears, as it were, rough hewn

from the rock. Men half tremble as they look upon him ; yet it is not the trembling of fear, but rather the thrill that passes through our frames as we look at some great work before us, and feel that we must summon all our powers to meet it. This angel's name is DIFFICULTY, and thus he speaks : ' I come from the source of all strength, and my mission is to make men strong. I come to brace thee for the great conflict of life ; to train thee, and cleanse thee, and harden thee ; to make thy dross into good metal, and thy crude iron into tough steel. It is not meet that a child of the Almighty should be a poor weakling, that must always be supported, and guarded, and hedged about against its enemies. I would make thee such that thou canst hold on thy way against men and demons, against powers and principalities. Come then to me, young spirit ! I will be thy nurse. I will nurse thee as the tempest has nursed me. My song at even shall be the song of the storm and the thunder. I will lead thee along rough and stony paths ; we will climb the steep mountain ; we will stem the roaring torrent ; we will walk under the starless sky ; the howling blast shall be our music, and the hard rock our bed. Come, then, and let me wrestle with thee, and buffet thee, till thy breath comes thick, and the sweat pours down, and the drops of blood stand painfully upon thy brow ! Soon thou shalt be able to buffet *me*. Thou shalt grow strong, and what is now pain shall become a high, exulting joy. Thou shalt mount up with wings, as an eagle ; thou shalt run and not be weary ; thou shalt walk and not faint. And when we part, and my work upon thee is accomplished, thy farewell words shall be, " Blessed is he that fought with me in the name of the Lord ! " '

Then cometh the end, the last of God's angels who visits men before they lay aside the mortal and put on the garment of Immortality. We call him DEATH.

We often dread his coming. We wish he would delay our meeting. We mistake his mission. We hear him spoken of as the Destroyer, when, if we knew him well, as we shall one day know him, we should rather call him the Restorer. Why should we fear him? Why not give to him also the welcome, 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord'? We lie down at night, wearied with our one day's work, and we do not fear the sleep that steals gently over us and blots out our existence for a few short hours. Nay, we ask for it; we pray for it; we sink into its arms, murmuring, 'Blessed sleep!' Why not give the same welcome to the mightier angel of a deeper slumber? If we could only see him as he is, the kind angel of our Father, as the Restorer instead of as the Destroyer, surely we should so greet him. If we could only see this life as it is, the first day of an eternal year, and the life beyond as *it* is, the morrow of this day, the continuance of this life; if we could only look upon death as the night between this evening and that morning, the gate opening upon that morning,—then surely we should not fear to greet him.

For who would live always as we are now, with no change, nothing better, higher, nobler? When youth is gone; when those we love are gone, or changed; when our powers are failing,—would we go on clinging to this shattered, worn-out life for ever? No! Death then comes to help us. He takes our wearied spirit in his arms, and bears it away, and lays it down at the feet of Him who first sent it forth. He takes the plant that could no longer grow here, and plants it in another soil, where it will renew its youth. Surely we may say, 'Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord!'

But what is our lesson from all this? We must receive God's messengers in the spirit in which He

sends them. So received, with acquiescence and welcome, they will give us their blessing. Otherwise they may leave a curse, and instead of giving sweetness and grace to our characters, they may produce only soreness or bitterness. So that, to a great extent, it rests with ourselves whether we have a blessing or not. So, Moses set before his people *a blessing and a curse*, and bade them choose between them.

And there is this further lesson from what we have been considering—that we, too, if we try to become worthy, may be angels to each other. If we stand ready, watching for the Master's sign, asking to be employed in his service, perhaps He will give even to us some message of love and mercy to deliver to a suffering, perishing, or imperilled fellow-creature. But we must be ready. God often gives such a message to those who are on the watch for it, when He will not force it upon one who is not prepared.

Let us, then, seek to be his angels; angels on the highway and by the fireside; angels, to comfort sorrow, to heal wounded hearts, to soothe pain, to bring peace, to still strife, to remove stumbling-blocks, to strengthen the weak, to open the eyes of the blind, and to those who sit in darkness to reveal, in one way or another, the Unknown God. Was not such the work that Jesus came to do on earth? and shall we not each do what little we can to follow in his holy footsteps?

Blessed, truly, is he who cometh, or goeth, or speaketh, or worketh, or waiteth, 'in the name of the Lord!'

SUNSHINE.

'Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.'—ECCLES. xi. 7.

'Rejoice evermore.'—1 THESS. v. 7.

WHAT a pleasant thing is sunshine! How the earth laughs in its light! How all nature breaks forth into gladness and puts on its holiday attire! The flowers open their bosoms to its warmth. The leaves of the forest spread themselves out and seem to dance for joy in its brightness. All earth and heaven are gay. The quiet clouds above float in a flood of light. The heart of man also opens to the universal gladness round him; and the light breezes, as they stir the tree-tops and bend the golden corn, seem to be repeating the song of the Apostle: they say, 'Rejoice evermore! Evermore rejoice, rejoice!'

Have you not yesterday looked upon some landscape when the clouds were lowering around, and the sharp wind driving over the plain, and gusts of pelting rain beating down the flowers and the crops, and all nature looked as if it were mourning and weeping, or suffering some passing pain? The whole scene looked desolate and melancholy; there was no gladness in it, and the heart, as it dwelt thereon, grew sad also. To-day you look again upon the same landscape. *Is it the same?* Yes; the mountains are there still, and the fields and rivers, the corn, the trees, and the flowers. But to-day it is no longer sad or poor; it is beautiful—oh, how

beautiful! And what has changed it? There is sunshine—only sunshine—but it has changed the desert to a paradise. The storm has ceased, the winds are still, the birds are lifting up their songs of gladness; the clouds—how beautiful!—are creeping along the mountain sides, like fragments of the drapery of heaven, and all is bright and gay, for the light of heaven is on the earth, and the earth sings, 'Rejoice evermore, evermore!'

Just so is it in the moral world. It is so pleasant to live in sunshine; to live among sunshiny people; to hear kind, cheerful voices; to meet smiles and glad faces. One's inner man is warmed by such companionship. One's heart opens to receive the joyous influence; is softened into love and kindness; brightened into cheerfulness; no harsh word, no voice of complaint, or lamentation: but from lip to lip, and from heart to heart, one general, though perhaps silent, song, which seems to say, 'Rejoice evermore!'

It is true there will be clouds and storms sometimes: and these have their uses and bring their blessings. Sorrow's showers will fall, for God knows that tears are sometimes better than smiles; and the diamond from the dark mine may be brighter than the laughing flower of the garden. The darkness of night is from God, as well as the brightness of noonday—it is as the shadow of his angel's wing, and some things are seen best in such shadow; but still, sunshine is a sweet and pleasant thing, and we had better let the dark messengers be all of God's sending. If we ourselves have power to call around us any 'spirits from the vasty deep,' let them be of the other kind—spirits of the gladsome face,—who shall come with this song of the Apostle on their lips, 'Rejoice evermore.' But have we any power to call such spirits—any power to make sunshine? Yes, we have. Let us think what makes the want of it—what makes the shadow. Not great trials, not sharp griefs. These are not generally the things

that shed melancholy over a man's life; many have borne them, and are yet cheerful people, with sunshine in their hearts. No; the shadows God sends are comparatively few; those we make for ourselves and for each other are many. Let us consider what is the cause of these shadows. Knowledge of the cause of any evil suggests the remedy. When we know what makes shadows, we know what would make sunshine.

And, first, we all know how much our mental state is influenced by our bodily condition. What a dark and gloomy shadow does ill-health sometimes cause to fall between ourselves and everything we look at! It surely behoves us, therefore, for the sake of others as well as for our own sake, to be careful, wise, and temperate in our whole way of life, so that this so frequent cause of gloom and sadness shall not, if we can help it, obstruct the sunshine of our lives.

But there are some who have not the excuse of ill-health, who yet needlessly bring clouds and gloom over what might otherwise be a sunny lot. They allow a fretful and complaining temper to be as a dark shadow, blotting out the brightness from their own lives, and the lives of all around them. Look at the man of evil temper. How he darkens the sunshine of heaven! how gloomy is the scene when *he* stands in the midst of it! See the anxious, fearful, unloving, sad, or scowling faces that gather round that man. The sunshine fades away in that evil presence, and a dark, cold chill falls upon the air around. Look at another—the man of kindly temper and loving heart, the smile in the eye, the word of cheery kindness on the lip, the helping hand, the strong or ready arm, the upward-looking eye. He stands, the centre of a smiling circle, all looking on him with a love like his own. Life, light, and warmth are round him, shadows fly, bad spirits come not near, all evil things shrink away, and ‘tears forget to flow.’ How charming to come within this sweet influence!

How our hearts warm in the glow! The very air seems filled with sounds of music, and sweet voices seem to sing, 'Rejoice evermore.'

If we would protect ourselves against the visits of dark and evil spirits, we must have an active, well-stored mind. The mind of man is like a hall opened within his animal nature, to be the gathering-ground of ideas, thoughts, memories, hopes, fears—things not visible to the outward eye, nor to be touched by mortal hands, yet which have the power to act upon our outward bodily selves, and to mould our character as clay is moulded in the hands of the potter. It is here, in this invisible chamber, that we seem to meet again the spirits of the departed. It is here that religion, its hopes, prospects, and revelations, becomes a present thing, felt and understood. Now what if this hall be empty? You know the parable of the empty house (*Matt.* xii. 43-45): 'When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out: and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.' What, then, if this hall of our mind be left empty? If, of all those invisible things that might be there, there be none there? No thoughts, no plans, no intentions, desires, hopes; no store of knowledge, no high ambition, no images of beauty to people it and have possession of it? The parable answers the question. It will not long be empty. If one kind of occupants do not people it, another kind will. If good spirits are not there, evil ones will come there; just as a wild beast in the wilderness, finding an empty cave, takes possession of it. So, as I said, there are few things like an active and an occupied mind for

keeping away the dark spirits, and we should do well to provide some wholesome interest or pursuit for our leisure hours, such as botany, for example, or chemistry, or gardening, or natural history; anything, if only something to occupy the mind wholesomely. Bodily activity also is a great help in keeping the mind occupied, and in thus preventing the entrance of dark spirits, and bringing sunshine. It is thus that our daily work, instead of being a curse and a burden, is one of the best blessings of heaven to man. Look at the man who has nothing to do; the idle man, always out of work, 'unfitted with an aim.' Who so empty and miserable? How heavily hang the hours; how wearily does he creep along! But when work comes, it is like the coming of an angel; with cheery voice it calls, it wakens up his spirit, gives him something to think about, stirs up the hours and drives them along cheerily, with quick and lively step. The mid-day meal is an event to look forward to: stopping work, another: then, rest; the return to the home; sleep, sweet sleep; and a new life begins with the morning. And so, with the sweat of thy brow, thou workest out the happiness of thy life. The dark spirits are kept at bay, and the sunshine has free entrance.

Encourage in yourselves loving thoughts of others; work for others; and, if the opportunity offers, *suffer* for others; sacrifice your own pleasure and convenience for others; make their interest yours; live, as it were, in their life. Especially let this be the case *at home*. That is the chief place where you can make sunshine: and sunshine there makes sunshine everywhere. Every member should do his part. One cloudy member may throw a cloud over all; but cheerful tones, kind words, helping hands, loving hearts, in honour and pleasure 'preferring one another,' a clean, neat house, comfortable meals, a bright fireside, a good, thoughtful, patient mother, a father *in his own place*—all this makes sun-

shine, and keeps it. Whenever you go into that house you will find a sunbeam playing about there—sunshine, light, and warmth.

But if we want the sunshine to be in our souls, bright, secure, unfailing, to be upon the future as upon the present, to be within as well as without, to be independent of all changes, to be clear of all shadows, to *shine through all clouds*, it must be such sunshine as St. Paul's was—it must be the sunshine of God's presence in our hearts, the true light of heaven. St. Paul was a religious man, but he was not a sad man. He felt the awfulness of religion, but he felt also its joy. He acknowledged the presence of the cloud as he saw it cast its shadow on the earth, but he knew that the sun was riding high above and beyond it, and would be still shining in his glory when the shadow and the cloud that cast it should have passed away. He knew the terrors of the Lord, and by them, when necessary, he did not hesitate to awaken slumbering men. But he knew also the love of the Lord, and he knew that that love would endure when the terror, like the cloud and its shadow, should also have passed away.

To many so-called Christians, religion is a sad and melancholy thing; and they sit in perpetual darkness as they think upon it. But it was not so with Paul, and it ought not to be so with any. Paul does not say, 'Weep and mourn for evermore, for ye are miserable sinners;' but, 'Rejoice evermore,' for God is in heaven above, and our Father's eye is ever watching over his children on the earth. And Paul speaks to all. Doubtless he had among his correspondents men of all sorts, characters, and conditions—men whose lots in life were very various, and who were living under very various dispensations. Yet he spoke to all; not only to the bright and gay, to the cheerful, busy, and strong, but also to the man who was suffering sore trial, to the sad and the sorrowing, the weak and the

stumbling, the fearful and faint-hearted. To all he says, 'Rejoice;' and this was because his ground of rejoicing went deeper than any mere earthly sources of gladness. He was looking to the whole of the life of a Christian man, not only to a part; and in this whole he saw enough to make a good man's heart rejoice, even though here, and now, he might be walking under the shadow of some dark cloud, or staggering under the weight of some sore burden. Looking to the glory and happiness of that future world which lay before him, and believing in its reality and its certainty as fully as he believed in the rising of to-morrow's sun, he saw enough to make him rejoice and triumph, whatever might be his passing lot in this world. But when he thus exhorted men to rejoice, he spoke to those only who believed what he believed, and who were looking forward to those brighter mansions of his Father's house that he himself was looking forward to. He would not tell those to rejoice who were without this faith and hope; but to those who possessed it he said, 'Rejoice.' If we would have sunshine in our hearts, and be secure of its shining always, even through the clouds of sorrow and disappointment, we *must* have this faith and this hope.

All other grounds of cheerfulness are short and uncertain, but with this our sunshine is perpetual. It cannot be utterly darkened; in the thickest shadow we shall still discern it and feel that it is there behind the cloud, bright and beautiful as ever. It shines upon us from the Infinite Future, and the nearer we approach that future the brighter still it shines. As we draw near to the darkness of the grave, we shall find it shining still, *far* above and beyond, for to us death will be the sleep that God gives to his beloved; and we shall know that when that sleep is passed, and the morning of a new life bursts upon our awakening eyes, the first fresh matin-song that we shall hear will be, 'Rejoice evermore!'

THE TEMPTATION.

'Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.—Again the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.'—MATTHEW iv. 1, 8–11.

A STRANGE story this! What does it mean? Is it a history of actual facts, or a mythical representation of the general truth that Christ had to endure temptation, like his brethren, that he would not be perfected, or ready for his work, till he had met all that humanity has to meet—till he had encountered man's worst foe, Sin? He was to end his earthly career by conquering Death: he must begin it by conquering Satan.

It is a grand idea, if this be the true one; and the picture in which this idea is symbolized, and Satan personified, and the whole brought before us like a living scene, is truly magnificent.

Satan, who through the long ages of the past, ever since man was man, had tried and tormented the whole human race; who had led so many astray from the paths of peace; who had plunged so many into the

gulf of ruin ; who had been so often the curse, the confounder, the conqueror of man,—now tries his power upon the Son of God himself. That Son comes to deliver man from the yoke of sin, which it had been Satan's constant occupation to force upon him. And now Satan withstands the Son of God, and tries to force that yoke upon him also. There they stand upon the mountain, face to face, the Deliverer and the Destroyer ; the Messenger from Heaven and the Prince of Hell ; the Good and the Evil ; the Light and the Darkness. Why stand they there, between heaven and earth, with the infinite sky above them, and at their feet all the kingdoms of the world ? Is Christ converting Satan ? No ! Satan would convert Christ ; Darkness would blot out the Light, or throw, at least, a shadow on its brightness ; Foulness would cast a stain on the white robe of Purity ; Evil would triumph over Good. But no ! Light is stronger than Darkness ; Good, than Evil. The Son looks up to the Father, and in that divine strength casts the Evil one behind him, and is left alone upon the field more than Conqueror.

Now I want to trace in this striking picture a likeness and epitome of our own experience, and to ponder for awhile over the nature, purposes, and proper treatment of those manifold temptations of the flesh and of the spirit that our poor humanity is heir to.

And, first, observe the expression, 'taken up by the Spirit.' He did not go forth voluntarily, defiantly, to meet the Evil One, but was 'led up by the Holy Spirit to be tempted of the Devil.' Very suggestive, this, of the meaning and nature of temptation. God has placed us in a world where, considering the nature He has given us and the circumstances He has placed us in, we are exposed, and intentionally exposed, to many temptations and trials of our virtue. We, too, are 'led up by the Spirit ;' and why ? Man, as he comes from the hand of his Maker, is at first only like the rough

material, the iron, fresh from the mine. The worker of that rude metal will thrust a crude bar of it into the blazing furnace, and turn it hither and thither in the glowing fires, and then lay it on the anvil, and beat it with innumerable blows, and crush it between inexorable rollers, and plunge it into smothering charcoal, and turn and twist and torture and temper it, till at length it is no longer the hard, brittle, half-earthy material he first took in hand, but something different—tougher, stronger, purer, better, and more valuable. Does he do all this to punish the iron, to torment or to defile it, or because he is angry with the material of his work? No! but that what was worthless may become useful, that the iron ore may be converted into steel.

And so it is with the tempering of the stuff man is made of. He is tried, like the iron—not to punish or torment him—not because God is angry with the nature He himself made—but that the iron that is in him may become steel. This is surely why we are ‘led up by the Spirit’ to meet evil, face to face; not that we should yield to it, not that we should fall down and worship; but that in resisting evil, we may declare our allegiance to good; and that in withstanding the temptations to sin, we make ourselves the servants of duty; that in wrestling with difficulty, we may grow strong; that by seeing both good and evil, we may make our choice between them voluntarily, with our eyes open, and thus make our service of God something more than the result of knowing no other Master.

We find ourselves here in a world abounding with temptation. The question before us is, how are we to meet those temptations so as to turn them into blessings—so as to make every trial a step upwards, and not downwards? For they may be made stepping-stones towards heaven. They may be made lessons in the great book of our spirit’s education. If we meet them rightly, they will be made so. For education necessi-

tates trial, difficulty, purification, discipline, struggle. How are we to learn obedience, if there be no law we must obey? How learn faithfulness, if there be no temptation to overcome? How trust, if there be no darkness to overshadow? How courage, if there be no danger to encounter? or love for good, if there be no knowledge of evil? A being might indeed be innocent while wandering among the gardens of Paradise, but it would be only the innocence of a child, one which means not that it does right, but that it does not do wrong. How is that child to become a man, great and noble, unless he comes forth into the great field of life, and measures himself with men, and wrestles with difficulty, and confronts danger, and tramples upon baseness, and casts sin behind him? It is this very conflict that develops the child into the man, that elevates the wanderer of Paradise into the servant and soldier of God.

It is a strange and terrible process, this education and purification of the human soul. The means, too, the agents used, are so strange, and some of them so terrible. Will nothing less than this suffice to fit a human spirit to stand before the throne of God? Pain, sorrow, difficulty, failure, are among these agents, these heavenly messengers. Grave and hard masters they seem; and among them is temptation, stranger and darker than any; Satan as the tempter, Satan as the teacher!

And there is this to be especially remarked about his teaching, that all men pass under his hands. The best and the worst, all are tried. As the rain descends on the evil and on the good, so do temptations lie in the way of both. The noble and the brave have to meet them, as well as the base, and the weak, and the low-minded. But the thing offered by the Tempter is not the same to all. A noble temptation for a noble mind, a base one for a sordid mind; but equally a temptation, and often perhaps as strong in one case as in the other.

For the nobly ambitious may be offered the prizes of a high and honourable ambition. For the sordid, the Tempter offers only thirty pieces of silver. It is quite enough ! To every human passion he promises delight and gratification. He appeals to the pride of the proud man, to the anger of the angry, to the love of the loving ; now to the fears of the timid ; now to the hopes of the sanguine ; now to the credulity of the credulous ; now to the greediness of the grasping ; now to the sensuality of the sensual. It is like a fisherman baiting his hook with this bait or with that, according to the creature he is fishing for ; a butterfly for one, a grub for another ; for one, the crown of a nation ; for another, only a glass of gin !

But how are we to deal with these temptations ? Are we to go forth to meet with, and subdue them ? or are we to fly from, and avoid them ? Every man in this matter, dealing faithfully and truly with himself, must examine his own heart, and trace back his own history, and then decide for himself—asking guidance—as to his line of warfare. If, by long experience, we have found that some one temptation has always proved too strong for us, that whenever we have met it, it has beaten us, then by all means let us avoid meeting it. Let us keep out of its way. If you find that in certain company you get into danger of evil, then keep out of that company. Give it a wide berth, plenty of margin. Do not venture too near the line of demarcation. ‘Play not too much about the utmost limits of good, lest peradventure thou slide over into evil.’ It is not enough for others to say, ‘*I get no harm among such things.*’ That is nothing to you. You know that *you do* get harm. Therefore avoid them altogether ! For remember that a man who never goes into battle without sustaining defeat, becomes weaker by every additional encounter. He gets into the habit of being beaten, a fatal habit for an army, or for a man. Avoid, then,

where you know you will not conquer. You will then grow strong by the habit of good, by the absence of evil. Your mind, accustomed to the presence of good spirits, will become an abode where evil ones will find no welcome. Evil will lose its power over you, and good will become the natural life and habit of your soul.

But sometimes temptation lies in the path of duty. Then you must meet it boldly, bravely, face to face; not boastfully, but as one who, in the way where the finger of God points, fears nothing and nobody, neither man nor devil. So long as you are following a course of action that conscience tells you is your duty, you must not turn aside from it for fear of meeting temptation there. But beware that you take right measures to arm yourself for the encounter. Trust not in your own strength, but in the strength of Him in obedience to whom you find yourself there. Look up to Him.

'Time was, I shrank from what was right,
For fear of what was wrong;
I dared not face the fiery fight,
Because the foe was strong.

'Now when my Saviour calls, I rise,
And calmly do my best;
Leaving to him, with silent eyes

Of hope and trust, the rest.'—J. H. NEWMAN.

Have you ever seen that fine picture, by Ary Scheffer, of Christ and Satan on the mountain summit? Our Lord turns from the kingdoms of this world, to which Satan is pointing, spread out far below their feet, to gaze into the infinite pure heaven above him, and to draw strength from the Source of strength, to be able to say from his heart, 'Get thee behind me, Satan!'

Or think for a moment of another picture—David, as he chose the five stones from the brook, and went forth alone to meet the Philistine. He did not forget to look up, or to trust in a stronger Arm than his own.

Oh, never be so presumptuous, so foolhardy, as to

think you can safely meet the trials and the crises of life in your own unaided strength. Dare not to encounter temptation without prayer. And let that prayer be 'in faith, nothing wavering,' believing that He whom you are speaking to hears you, and in his own way will help you.

But you must ask in truth also, with the full, earnest desire that He *may* hear you; and, above all, with the real, active effort and resolution to help yourself. There must be no traitor in your heart, half wishing that you might have the pleasure, even while your lips are asking to be saved from the sin. You must ask God to work with you and for you, and help you to be faithful to yourself and to Him, and to help you to work for yourself and with Him. God will have nothing to say to any prayer offered up by half a heart. You must give up yourself wholly to Him, if you are to hope for either his help or his blessing. But if you do this, Satan will find that he is wasting his time upon you, and that you have a Friend above who makes even you too strong for him.

'Angels came and ministered unto him.' Yes, so it will ever be. If we have boldly and faithfully resisted the Evil One, he will turn from us; the hour of darkness will pass away, and sweet thoughts will come, like angels, and minister unto us. Good spirits will come and make their abode with us. Is it not so? Can you not recall the memory of some struggle in your own heart, like that between Christ and Satan? You met the Tempter perhaps suddenly; he took you by surprise; or he spread out before you the landscape of your desires, stirring up within you all the fierce passions of your nature, troubling it to the very depths, as he declared, 'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me!' The chances seemed against you. You were weak, and blinded by the splendour of the offer. The enemy was strong, and

his real character was not apparent at first sight. The prospect he pointed to was like the gardens and bowers and bright waters of the realms of Eden. They seemed to beckon and say, 'Come!' and the passions of human nature within you seconded the invitation, and cried loudly, 'Aye, go!' The struggle was like one between life and death. On one side was Joy, bright and beautiful; on the other, Loneliness, Pain, or the tame, dull, hard-trodden highway of life's common duty. You felt, 'Ah! *that* would be *life*! If I might have that to-day, I would be content to die to-morrow!' But then, in time, you remembered God. He had whispered to your heart, and in a moment you looked up to Him and saw that his silent finger pointed in another direction. You prayed with all your heart and soul to be led aright. And, like the fire that fell from heaven upon the altar of Elijah, so did God's saving fire fall upon your heart, and you had strength given you to turn and say to the alluring prospect, 'Get thee behind me! for thou savourest not of the things of God!' Do you remember then how Satan turned and left you? And as you looked after him, your eyes were opened, and you saw how dark and foul he was, and you wondered that such a thing as he could ever have had power to trouble you.

And then the angels came. Sweet thoughts, grateful thanksgiving, calm repose. 'It is over,' you said; 'I am safe! My eyes are opened. The darkness is passed away. My soul is quiet. I feel that God is near. I feel as if I had made a step towards being a true servant of God.' Such thoughts are some of the angels that come and minister to us, as we rest after the battle. And as if afar off, high above the clouds, we hear a chorus of heavenly voices singing, 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the Crown of Life.' And again: 'to him that overcometh, I will give to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father on his throne.'

THE BOX OF OINTMENT.

'She hath done what she could.'—MARK xiv. 8.

JESUS was at Bethany. A certain man lived there whose name was Simon. He had been called the leper, and probably Jesus had cured him of his leprosy. He made a feast in honour of the Master, and many Jews were there from the great city. Lazarus also was among the guests. The sun would be going down, and the cool hours of evening drawing on, as they lay there on their couches in the open court of the house. You might hear them talking quietly together, subdued perhaps by the solemn beauty of the hour, discussing many things: the approaching Passover, the state of the crops and vineyards, the multitude of the arriving pilgrims, and other similar topics. But where Jesus was, there would be, mingling with such topics, a higher tone, a gentler atmosphere, full of the holy Presence among them. Those present may not have acknowledged his authority, but they must have felt his power.

As he lay there, a woman entered, having in her hand a box of precious ointment. Anxious to pay Jesus some tribute of honour and affection, she came and stood, silent and reverent, behind him, and there, before them all, she anointed his head with the ointment, whose sweet odour filled the house. All eyes were turned towards the scene. Some murmured; some said, 'Well done!' Jesus well understood what she meant

to express. 'Let her alone,' he said. 'Against the day of my burying she hath done this.' He would not allow this loving tribute to be valued by the mere arithmetic of money. Others thought it a misappropriation, a gross waste. Who was the better for it? Who fed the better for it? Was it not worth three hundred pence? Aye! and what was the love of a true heart worth? Would three hundred pence cover that?

The moral point of the story lies in this, that the act was trifling: it might have been something else; it might have been the washing of his feet; it might have been the shedding of a tear. But the spirit which that act expressed was just that which Jesus most loved and valued. It was the spirit of love, sympathy, devotion, worship. It said, 'Would that I could do something more to prove my love! Would that I could serve you better!' Jesus well knew the value of such love. He felt its priceless worth. It was the sympathy of a true heart, falling upon his spirit just when he wanted sympathy; just when he was looking forward to the trials of the coming week; just when he saw the cup filling that ere long he was to drink to the dregs. He felt her sympathy, and his heart thanked her for it.

Does it not sometimes happen in our own experience that some friend is in trouble or difficulty, or passing through some crisis of his life, and we long to help him, to do something for him, to prove our friendship? We would so gladly shield him from danger, or bear his sorrow for him, and yet we can do nothing. But is it nothing, at such a time, to give him our presence and sympathy, to take our stand by his side before the world to show that we are his friends, to tell him that our heart is with him, that we would help him if we could, but that we will at any rate stand by him, and try to strengthen him to bear his burden or his cross, though we cannot bear it for him? Is it

nothing, at such a time, to have a friend's love and sympathy, to feel the grasp of his hand? Was it nothing to Jesus that four faithful friends were standing near his cross, staying beside him to the last, though they could not save him from that cross? And was it nothing to Jesus at the house of Simon, when enemies were around him, when false witnesses were watching him, when priests and rulers were waiting to destroy him, to be assured of the sympathy and devotion of at least one true, faithful, loving heart?

Far from feeling it to be nothing, Jesus felt it to be of great value. He was so deeply moved and comforted by the devotion expressed in this beautiful and touching act of loving reverence, that he declared that wherever, through all the world and through all future ages, his gospel should be preached, what this woman had done should be told, for a memorial of her.

'She hath done *what she could*.' Why, what more *could* she do? Ah! but how much *less* she might have done! Who among us has done what he could? Of how very few can this be truly said! Upon how few tombstones could you write this epitaph! Yet this is just what God requires from each of us, that we should do what we can, and He asks no more. No one can say it is impossible to do or be *that*. You are a poor man; then God does not expect of you what needs much money. You are weak, or young, or inexperienced; then He does not look for great strength or wisdom from you. You are walking in the lowly paths of life; then God does not require from you such service as He does require from those whom He has placed in the position of rulers or leaders of the people. But He does ask that you should do what you can; and if you call this hard service, you do not know when you have got a good Master.

In one aspect of your lot you may well be thankful if you are walking along the valley of life, if your

talent be only a small one ; because when you have but one talent it is so much easier to manage it. Your duties are so simple and so few ; your path is comparatively so plain. If you have ten talents, you have ten responsibilities, ten duties, ten dangers, ten enemies, ten vulnerable points in your armour, ten thousand eyes watching you, ten thousand tongues talking about you, ten thousand tiny chains hanging on your limbs. Aye ! you may sometimes envy the great and powerful, because you think only of their greatness and power, of the admiration that surrounds them, of the splendour that covers them. But you know nothing, perhaps, of the anxieties, and responsibilities, and cares,—of the watchings, and envyings, and calumnies, and hatreds that attend them. When you compare your lot with theirs, you think of their privileges, but you forget your exemptions. They have much ; you are spared much. If, instead of looking on a part of the lot of another man, you could see the whole, you would very likely find that the balance of happiness and peace, and of all that is most desirable for man, was on your side rather than on his.

What a beautiful sight is some humble servant of God, or, it may be, a body of such men, facing some duty, clear and unmistakeable, yet so small and humble, so out of proportion to the great effort or sacrifice they must make to do it, that it seems hardly worth while, hardly worth its cost ! Yet these men, in spite of this consideration, set themselves to do it with their might, to give to it their best, since the duty, small though it be, appears to them clear. It may prove to be part of some greater work, it may help forward some worthy cause. They might have said, If we could accomplish that greater work, then indeed it would be worth giving our whole lives to it. But what we can do is so little ! It is like nothing ! It is not worth while !' But the Spirit replies, 'Let it be said of you, They have done

what they could.' You cannot build this great temple; you cannot raise that dome, or lift this column to its place; but you can carry a brick. Then do so! It was thus the Pyramids were built. No one man raised those gigantic structures, but each man laid his stone, and there they stand, the wonder and admiration of distant ages. No one man's name is there, but they bear the mark of a hundred thousand hands. So, if there be a plain duty before you, do it, though a small one; do what you can. There is an acquaintance of yours in danger of falling into bad company or evil habits, or of taking the wrong turn at some crisis of his life, and perhaps for want of a friend's hand, or a friend's word or warning. Give him that hand, that word, that warning. Save *one* fellow-man. Let there be one sinner the less; nay, even one *sin* the less. Never mind about saving the world, about cleaning the city, about turning thousands to righteousness. Save *one* from evil. Cure one fault in yourself. Make one of the least of Christ's brethren happy. What you cannot do, leave to God. He will take that upon Himself. He will look to you and say, 'Have you done what you could?'

You have, in the first place, to look at home. You have to cleanse yourself, not a city; to act upon your children, not upon mankind. Consider what you can do, and how best to do it—what are your duties, what your opportunities. Try to fill your home with love, with cheerfulness, with diligence, with faithfulness, with patience. Bring up your sons and daughters to be blessings in their home, wherever it may be; to love duty before pleasure, and usefulness before ease, and honesty before gain, and the good of others before their own. And by thus working in your home, and sending forth from it upright and worthy men and women, you will be doing more for the general good of mankind, and for the coming of God's kingdom upon earth, than

if, *instead* of doing this home work, you were to preach to multitudes, or to instruct statesmen.

Picture to yourselves some one, a cripple perhaps, or blind, or otherwise afflicted, whose life is one of suffering and privation. He is laid aside, out of the current of human life, helpless and useless, it may seem, and a burden to his friends. His first great duty is to bear patiently the heavy cross God has laid upon him—to bear, and to trust. But he looks round to see if there is nothing more he can do. However little, he will do it. He perceives that though he may be able to *do* nothing for anybody, yet he can *feel* for them, he can keep his heart warm towards them, can give his sympathy, if he has nothing else to give; he can care for their cares, and interest himself in their interests, and speak an encouraging word, or a warning word, or a bold word, to some heart that needs such. He is able sometimes to do what busier men cannot. He may think for those about him, and counsel or cheer them, and draw them to right thoughts of that God under whose will he is himself suffering. If he can do nothing for the bodily wants of his neighbours, he may perhaps do something for their spiritual wants. From the darkness in which he lies, he may see stars which they are unable to see. These he may show them; of these, talk to them; by these, raise their thoughts heavenward. He may thus, in some ways, do more than if he were a strong man, 'going forth to his work and to his labour until the evening.' Perhaps this is how he sets to work. Some poor neighbour is sick; he sends him a kind message, a flower, a sign of sympathy. More than once he sends such greetings. Do you ask, 'What is the good of that?' About the same, in kind, as pouring out the ointment. Or he hears of some wild young fellow, who has, he feels sure, much good in him, but who is in danger of going to destruction. He gets this lad to come and see him. He tries to interest him, to

gain a hold over him, to get him to speak of his favourite pursuits, or of his friends. He tells him stories of his own past life, or of what he has gathered from books, and by degrees leads that young spirit to turn from the evil food he has been feeding on, by awakening in him a taste for higher and nobler things.

Or again, when kind folks come to see him, he does not trouble them with the tale of his own sorrows, so much as lead them to speak of their own, to open their hearts to him, to cast their burden upon him, to seek counsel of him ; so that people go to him, not to give, but to receive ; and thus, instead of being the most helpless and forlorn man in the district, he becomes one of the most sought and most useful. Beginning by casting a mite into the treasury, by pouring a little ointment on a head he loved, he finds that his mite, under the blessing of the Master, grows into a great treasure, and that the ointment he poured forth so freely flows back in joy upon himself. He has done what he could.

In that great day when we shall all stand before the Judgment-seat, the question asked of each, as he awaits his sentence, will not be, 'Have you done much or little ?' but, 'Have you done *what you could* ?' This is all God asks of us, but this much He requires of us all. The question will be put to high and low, rich and poor ; to the king, the statesman, the philosopher, the nobleman, and the artisan. No one can render so large an offering as to evade the inquiry whether it should not have been larger. No one is so poor, or so small, or so afflicted, that he can hide himself from this question, or reply, 'Lord, there was nothing for such a one as I to do.' The word will still come ringing in his ear, 'Have you done *what you could* ?'

THE ONE TALENT.

'The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods.'—MATTHEW xxv. 14.

THERE is one point in this parable to which I want especially to direct your attention. The condemnation falls on the man who had received only *one* talent. Till we heard the story we might rather have guessed that Christ would have selected the ten-talent man for punishment. The lesson might have seemed more striking if it had been the large important trust that produced nothing. But here, the smallest gift, the most humble trust, is selected. The man to whom very little, one talent, had been entrusted is called the last, and his master waits to see how much this little seed had grown into. The servant unrolls a napkin and produces the one talent, just as he had received it. It has not grown. He has done nothing with it. The reason he gives seems a very strange one, but he has no better. And the talent is taken from him and given to him who has twenty talents already. There is a strong significance in this point of the story.

Whom was Christ addressing? His disciples, humble men, one-talented men,—not the great of the earth, not the rich or the powerful, but fishermen, husbandmen, men of labour, whose dwelling was the cottage, whose ordinary round of life was small and narrow, with room

for the cultivation of one talent only. He therefore selects the individual of his story who most resembles them, that they may learn and apply the moral to their own case. We are like them in this, so it behoves us to mark well this point of the parable. God has given us one talent: where is it?

It is not the number of talents and opportunities that is of any consideration in the eye of God, but the improvement and use of them, whatever they are; and as strong an obligation is laid on a man who has only one, to employ that well, as if he had ten, the importance of the thing depending entirely on the quality of the obedience—not on the things being small or great, but on the man being faithful. He who does his best is the one whom God approves. The kind of work and the amount of work given is God's appointment; with that we have nothing to do; He gives the work, it is ours to do it.

To us, indeed, it is by no means the same thing whether a man has ten talents or only one. We are attracted by the largeness of the gift, God only by the use made of it. To human eyes it is a beautiful and glorious thing to see a man to whom his Maker has given ten talents, and who is spending them in the service of his God and of his fellow-men. He has health, strength, wealth, station, power, intellectual superiority, warm affections, an open, generous, and noble nature—wisdom walking hand in hand with love, grace, and virtue. Cities open their gates to such a one, men open their hearts, earth itself opens a highway for his footsteps. Blessings strew his path. Has that man power? He uses it to restrain the evil, to assist the good, to withstand violence and wrong, to protect innocence and weakness. Has he wealth? He uses it as a trust, not to waste or scatter indiscriminately, but guided by thoughtful care, so as to bring forth fruits of good. Is he wise and full of knowledge? Still it is a

trust, to be used for enlightening the intellects of others, for pushing forward the boundaries of truth, breaking the bonds of bigotry, and helping his fellows in their search after the golden secret. Has he the gift of eloquence? You hear him pleading for man against himself, pleading for the cause of God and human happiness, upholding the right, defending the truth, lifting his hearers above the darkness of sense and sin, and calling forth an echo from the inner spirit that dwells in every human heart.

But such men are rare. God does not scatter his treasures carelessly; it is evidently no part of his plan to make all men great, or to endow all with splendid gifts or golden opportunities. He generally makes them small, gives them one talent, humble duties. If they would be greater, they must grow to greatness. So, though our talents be not ten, let us consider what they are, and what those must do who have only one.

Those who have but a small trust committed to them are apt to think that, because they have not ten talents, they have not one—that because they are not among the giants of their race, they are nobody—that because they cannot do everything, they can do nothing, and therefore they make no attempt to do anything. This may be mere idleness, or it may be rebellious discontent. Because we cannot be what we should like to be, rich, great, powerful, therefore we will not be what we might be, what God invites us to be, commands us to be. Moreover, because such talents as we have are common to all or to many, we refuse to recognise that they are talents. And yet certain of the very greatest talents given to man are given to all. Let us consider some of these.

Have you the power of speech? Think what that power is. It is the telegraph between mind and mind. By making certain sounds I can communicate the thought that is in my mind to your mind. This, then,

is to be used in God's service. It is a talent we seldom wrap up in a napkin, but we often do worse with it. It were better for many men that they were dumb, for they would thus escape much sin. For many, instead of using it for the purpose for which God gave it, use it for the very opposite. The tongue was given that it might praise God and bless men. Often it does neither : it takes the name of God in vain, it blasphemes, it curses, it breathes poison into others' ears, it speaks evil of the good and good of the evil, it sneers at what is innocent and holy, it soils itself with slander, it repeats the evil story which stabs a fellow-creature in the dark, it becomes, in short, a talent of the devil. This is worse than wrapping it in a napkin : he had better have been dumb. And yet, what a talent that tongue might have been ! what words of truth, and love, and purity, and sublimity, and prayer might have been spoken by it, if only the heart of which it is the utterer had been thus noble, pure, and loving ! How it might have helped along the feeble steps of some friend or neighbour on the right path ! How it might have put good thoughts into some darkened mind ! How it might have conveyed gentle words of comfort to some half-broken, drooping, wounded, or trembling heart ! How it might have spoken the word in season for the right and good, or have helped to withstand falsehood and wrong ! How it might have gone to some poor trembling spirit, cast down with fear and doubt as to the hereafter, thinking that God's wrath was pursuing it, and that weeping and gnashing of teeth was awaiting it beyond the veil ; and how it might have pointed to the heaven above and reminded that spirit of God's love, of his fatherhood to his children, of his mercy, tenderness, and long-suffering, and asked that poor trembler if a God of mercy could so treat a weak child of mortality, the work of his own hand, the child of his own love ; and how it might have repeated the words of Christ and

the promises of God, till these sounds of heaven should have silenced men's ravings about hell, and perfect trust and love should at length have cast out fear! Might it not have done all this? and if it had done so, would it not have been a talent worth having and worth using? And might not the man who held it have lifted up his face even before his all-perfect Master, and brought his talent, not wrapped in a napkin, but laid down openly, humbly, trustingly at his feet?

Another talent, often little thought of, is the power of making others happy. All have this, more or less, and he who has it, in however small a measure, will have to give account for his use of it. None are so poor, or so desolate, or so much alone, that others are not in some measure dependent upon them for their daily happiness. We act and re-act upon each other. We have families, wives, husbands, children, neighbours; and in our relations with all these it is in our power to add to their happiness or to take from it. Every day, sometimes every hour of the day, we may drop a little seed of pleasure or good along their path, and it will spring up and grow, and sweet flowers will blossom by the way; one flower will bring another; one kind deed or word will bring another. Or, on the other hand, the seed may be scattered from which thorns grow; and one thorn will bring another, and that another, and so on till the way is strewn with thorns, when it might just as easily have been strewn with flowers. It is wonderful how some people seem to have the faculty of making everybody happy about them, how they bring sunshine wherever they go, healing strife, speaking words of comfort to the sorrowful, of hope to the desponding, of strength to the weak, and making their very presence like that of some good angel; so that when you approach them it is like coming into the sunshine, and when you leave them, you have that sunshine still lingering in your heart. But there

are others who, by their fretful temper, their selfish thought for themselves and disregard for others, their carelessness about saying things which they know will give pain, or doing things they would not like others to do to them, or perhaps even by worse than this, by violence, and drunkenness, and evil passions, make themselves a daily torment to all around them. The amount of happiness made or marred by each one, even the humblest, is immense.

Large bounties to bestow we wish in vain,
But all may shun the guilt of giving pain.

Then there is the talent of example. There are many ways and means, plans and modes of operation, for promoting the progress of good among mankind, extending the influence of Christianity and the kingdom of God. We have sermons, good books, oceans of tracts, churches and schools, preachers and teachers; but, after all these and among all these, nothing is so effective for the promotion of good as a good life. If a man will only live like a Christian, if he will feel and think, speak and act, like a real, deep, sincere, practical Christian, he will do more towards spreading Christianity than if he set to work as a professed missionary, and spent the rest of his life in preaching to the blackest savages he could find upon the face of the earth. If he will only live like a servant of God, obeying and trusting Him, and ever acting as if under his all-seeing eye, he will do more towards advancing God's kingdom and multiplying the number of his servants than if he were to teach, and preach, and exhort, and expound, from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, without living the life to which he pointed.

So, you see, you who think you have no talent and can do nothing, who come and tell God that He has given you no power by which you can serve Him—you

have at least *three* talents, given by Him, to be used and improved by you, in his service, for your own amendment, and for the good of your fellow-men. You cannot come before Him now and tell Him that He is a hard Master, reaping where He has not sown, and requiring from you what He has not given you ; He has given you all these, and more than these, and all these He will inquire about hereafter, when He comes to reckon with his servants. Look to it then that you have a better tale to tell than that slothful servant in the parable. Do not come and say, 'I have done nothing because Thou gavest me nothing,' but try to be able to say, 'Lord, Thou gavest me these few talents, and though I once thought them small, it was because I knew not then how great they were. But since I came to understand this, I have tried to use them as Thou commandest ; poorly and blunderingly I have done the work ; blindly and weakly I have used thy gifts ; but I have tried, I have watched, I have prayed that I might put them to thy usury. I know they are stained, they are broken, they are few ; but thou wilt remember they are the offerings of weak mortality ; what they want let Thy mercy bountifully supply.'

We must always remember that talents bring with them responsibilities, anxieties, duties, troubles, temptations. He who has ten talents has ten burdens, ten trials, ten dangers, perhaps also ten sorrows. Everything is multiplied by the same number. When, therefore, you see a man rolling in riches, remember he has something else besides his riches, sometimes so much else that it would be a mercy to take them away from him, that all the cares and burdens they have brought upon him might be taken away too. The same with power, with high rank, even with superior education—they all bring their corresponding burdens and responsibilities. This should be kept in mind when we are comparing one lot with another. The man to whom

only one talent has been given, has, it is true, but one talent, but he has a thousand exemptions. In obscurity he may find peace, freedom, safety ; he is not seen or known, feared or courted. Happy is that man, if he only knew how much ! But place him upon a pedestal, make him a mark for observation, obtrude him upon the eyes of all men, and he must take heed that there be no stain on his garment, no folly to be remembered, no call of duty unattended to ; for if the eyes of all are upon him, so also will be their tongues, their envyings, their criticisms, and their condemnations. A great man is apt to become a very slave to his greatness, no longer free to whistle or sing in his obscurity, but the servant of all men and their conventionalities.

The only thing then we have to care about in this matter of God's talents, is not whether He has given us few or many, but whether what He has given are used for the purpose for which He gave them. It is not he who has done most, but he who has done his best, whom God will hereafter value and approve. If it can be said of any man, when his life on earth is past, 'He has done what he could,' this is a man's best epitaph. As to having ten talents or having only one—as to this man being among the rich or learned, that man being among the poor or the ignorant on the earth—one being in the front ranks, well known of all men, and another being lost among the nameless multitude, and passing away without a monument or a memory—all that matters little. The time is short ; yet a little while and we shall all be equal so far as this earth is concerned—but in the great hereafter they who have best improved the talents granted them will be the nearest to their God.

A LIVING SACRIFICE.

'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.'—ROMANS xii. 1.

OF the origin and first meaning of the rite of sacrifice we know little. Among what people it was first practised—what exactly was the instinct that prompted the idea of slaying an animal upon the altar as an offering to an unseen God—how it gradually grew to signify and typify something more than was at first intended—all this is lost in the dimness that covers the early history of mankind. Scripture throws no light upon the subject, and no history records its origin. It is simply spoken of as an existing custom among the first inhabitants of the earth. In various forms and among many peoples we find it, century after century, still holding its place in human worship, till at length—as we behold the word written over the Cross of Calvary—we start to think how much that is deep, mysterious, and awful, may be hidden in that word.

But whatever may be the exact meaning of sacrifice, or the history of its early practice among men, the present signification of it, and that in which it presents itself before us in our text, is clear enough. It means a giving up to God, or for our fellow-men, of something which is valuable to ourselves, and which it costs us something to give up. We lay it upon the altar of God

as an offering of worship, a test of obedience to Him, or as a means of securing a blessing or benefit to some one of our fellow-men, which he could receive only by some such giving up or suffering on our part. This is sacrifice.

If some one I love has incurred a penalty, or made himself liable to some punishment, and I say to the judge, 'Spare him ; I will bear the punishment for him,' then I offer myself as a sacrifice for him. If a friend earnestly desires some pleasure or some benefit which is rightly mine, but would be his if I did not stand in the way of his having it, and if I voluntarily give up my claim in his favour, then I make a sacrifice for him.

If I take some heavy burden from his life, and lay it on my own life, and so walk on in shadow that he may walk in sunshine, then I make a *living* sacrifice for him.

If the public voice is lifted up against me for some evil deed or foolish act which was another's doing and not mine, and yet I open not my lips to justify myself, but suffer silently his dark reproach, in order that no evil shadow shall fall upon him, then again I offer up myself before God as a living sacrifice for him.

Or, again, if in the morning of my days, in the still communings of a young soul with God, I devote myself (praying for his help and blessing) soul and body henceforth to the service and life of God ; and if, through the long years that follow, I earnestly and faithfully strive to fulfil this youthful vow, giving up everything that seems to make the work more difficult or to throw unnecessary stumbling-blocks in my heavenward way ; and if, in spite of often sinning and falling and blundering and wandering, I yet, on the whole, do try constantly and watchfully to be a true servant of God, and resolutely cast behind me everything that would thrust itself between him and me ; if I lay my dearest affection or my most strong desire on his altar, and give it up to Him, rather than that it should ever rise like a cloud

between us ; I say, if, through his blessing and help, I am enabled thus after some imperfect fashion to walk in his way, then I have offered up myself as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.

This is just what the Apostle exhorts his friends to do in the passage I have chosen for my text.

This giving up may be more or less—the deed done may be comparatively great or small ; but if it be a giving up or taking up for others, at cost to ourselves, it is a living sacrifice which, whether great or small, is a holy and acceptable sacrifice before God.

Did you ever, when a boy, receive a blow intended for your friend ? or, as a man, take upon yourself a pain or a punishment, that one you love might be saved from it ? How dear that blow ! how precious that pain ! The fiercer the fire of it, the more glad you were that you had taken it on yourself. You say, ‘ *He* would have had to bear this ! ’ If you have ever, in your youthful or your manly years, taken on yourself this little experience of a Christian’s life, then you know something of the *joy* of sacrifice.

This spirit and power of sacrifice is the highest attainment of human virtue, the nearest approach to Him who died on Calvary for man. It was peculiarly his spirit—the spirit and essence of his religion.

Self-sacrifice ! How few are capable of this ! How many other virtues do men practise, yet cannot rise to this ! How many lesser virtues attract far more applause and admiration ! Men value courage, honour, fidelity, endurance. They worship talent, they bow to power, and are dazzled by success ; but sacrifice they see not. It is a flower that blooms in the shade. It does not thrust itself upon the gaze of men. It seeks not men’s applause. It has already mounted far above the hearing of the shouts of the multitudes, or the sight of the triumphs of those whom men delight to honour. It has had to deal with realities too great and deep, and

touching too nearly the foundations of human happiness, to have any thought left for what men may think or say. Self-sacrifices are not generally made on mountain-tops, that all the world may see them. The altars on which they are offered are built in the heart of the offerer, which, indeed, may perhaps be itself the sacrifice; or their smoke may go up unnoticed from some quiet hearthstone, by the home fireside. And even they who have benefited by the sacrifice may not be aware of it, or may forget it; but no sacrifice thus made will be forgotten where it is of more importance it should be remembered.

There *are* sacrifices, indeed, which are made upon mountain-tops, before both God and man—great, noble, sublime sacrifices. History is spangled all over with the names of those who have made them. A hero laying down his life for a great cause; a patriot pouring out his blood for his country; a martyr perishing on the scaffold, hanging on a cross, or bound to a fiery stake—passing through the fire to the rewards of the faithful and the brave. Wonderful and bright are these examples of a dying sacrifice. We feel that these men must indeed have been nobler beings than ourselves, who could thus count pain and death as dust in the balance when weighed against duty, or country, or faith. We ask ourselves, Could *we* have thus met death and borne unutterable pain? What trust those men must have had in the unseen future! what courage, what endurance, what an all-powerful sense of duty! what real worship of the good, the right, and the true! What faith in God! How Christ must look upon them, as they drink his cup and are voluntarily baptized with his baptism, and say, 'Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends.' Well does our Church call them 'the noble army of martyrs.'

As they pass in long review before me, I stand abashed at my habitual want of reverence for human

nature. For I confess that sometimes, when standing as a spectator in some place of public resort, I see the crowds of fellow-beings that pass before me, and notice how poor appear to be their aims, how animal their desires, how barren their intellects, how hard, often, their hearts, how wrapt up in the present their thoughts and speculations, and how little altogether there seems to be of the divine or immortal in their nature,—I confess my feeling towards my fellow-men is anything but reverence. But when I look upon these bright stars scattered over the human firmament, and think how many there are now, even within the range of my own knowledge, who are inspired by a like spirit, and are serving God as nobly, though less publicly, in the silence and obscurity of private life, and remember that there must be thousands and tens of thousands like them of whom I know nothing, then I correct my general estimate of humanity—I look on this picture and on that—and feel that, weak and poor as is mere mortal man, there is yet a spark of the divine within him that promises immortality.

But these bright stars of which I have been speaking were *dying* sacrifices. The Apostle speaks of a *living* one. What is that? It is—not to pour out the life's blood upon the altar, and so finish the sacrifice at once, but to live the life of sacrifice. It means, to devote yourself, soul and body, through life to the service of God; to obedience, and love and devotion to his will; to cast aside and trample down everything that shall come between yourself and Him. Is there some darling pleasure that threatens to draw you away from the narrow path of duty? Lay it on his altar: give it up, though it break your heart-strings. Is there some cherished indulgence or sin that, again and again, raises a dark cloud of separation between yourself and God? Cast it behind you; tread it under foot. Let it perish in the holy fire of God's altar. Does thy right hand

cause thee to offend? 'Cut it off.' Let nothing, *nothing* be allowed to stand between God and you. Make no parley; attempt no compromise. Present yourself an entire and a living sacrifice.

But there are other forms of sacrifice—many *parts* of this complete sacrifice. Have you not seen a noble woman bearing up bravely under the ill-treatment of an unworthy husband? By taking upon herself the work that should have been his—by doing double duty, as it were, and bearing the whole weight of the responsibility that he ought to share, by filling the place of father as well as mother—she labours unweariedly to hide his shame, to bring up her children respectably, and to present a good front to the world. She is broken down by the effort and the stress, but her health is only a part of the living sacrifice she lays upon the altar.

And there are noble brothers, too, and sons, who have refused to devote to selfish schemes for their own comfort or enjoyment the powers that they are using for the benefit of others; who have given up, perhaps, the sweet prospect of home, and children, and domestic happiness, for the sake of a parent or of sisters who are dependent upon them. That is indeed a life sacrifice.

Another noble woman I have known who, rather than throw a cloud over the young life of her children, or darken the sunny lot of loving friends, bore in secret for years the burden and the pain of a disease which she knew to be mortal, and went on her way cheerfully, denying to herself the comfort of open intercourse with friends concerning her heavy trial and the support of their loving sympathy.

Even the very youngest amongst you may find opportunities for the practice of this highest virtue of self-sacrifice. Two little brothers went to see the volunteers reviewed. They became entangled in a crowd of men and women, so that they could see nothing. The elder of the two was beckoned to by a friend to jump

up on to a stump of a tree beside him, whence he might get a good view of the soldiers as they passed. But no ; he will not let go the hand of his little brother, and another boy takes the place on the stump, while our little friend, not without difficulty, manages to raise his little brother on to his own shoulders that he may enjoy the pleasure which for his sake he himself has foregone.

But many examples of these living sacrifices are of such a nature, belonging so much to the private history of individual hearts—so intertwined with feelings and affections too sacred for public inspection, that I, for one, will not dare to lift the curtain they have drawn around them, or rudely expose what is between those hearts and God. I bow, respectfully and tenderly, as I recognize the signs of sacrifice ; as I catch a waft of the incense or a glance of the fire ; or as I perhaps overhear the sigh, or the groan, or the prayer of the sufferer. His Heavenly Father, I know, is not far from him.

The Apostle says, 'holy, acceptable unto God !' Aye, and what more so ? Shoot forward your thoughts to the great day of reckoning—the day also of revelation ; for it is good to gain the habit of trying all things by this test. Stand, then, and watch the weighings of all earthly things—of human greatness and human virtue, and human pursuits, pleasures, and ambitions. Then will you understand that God seeth not as man seeth, and valueth not as man values. What dazzled human eyes will not dazzle His. What was unnoticed by human eyes will not be passed by as He looks upon it. What, among men, had been forgotten, will be remembered now ; and the silent offerings of humble hearts will now send up the smoke of their accepted sacrifices before the throne of God. Then shall we understand the mystery and the beauty of sacrifice.

When asked, 'Where is thy sacrifice ?' how many will have no answer to give ! 'Sacrifice ? I know not the word. I never made *one*. I have none to offer.'

What? never given up a pleasure to secure it for a friend? Never borne pain that he might be spared pain? Never laid one desire upon the altar of duty, and poured out its blood as an offering to God, giving Him all you had to give, though it were but as a mite cast into his treasury? Nothing?

But, to these others, 'Where is thy sacrifice?' They bow in the dust before Him and are silent. He will see the case and answer for them. 'Thy sacrifice is here; it is thyself. Thou didst lay thyself upon my altar—a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable.' 'Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

More than this—Christ will call for them—the self-sacrificing. Surely he will gather them together as being peculiarly his own, having upon their foreheads his especial mark. He, the first; they, having drunk of his cup and been baptized with his baptism. Little will they reckon, now, that their names blazed not forth upon the page of human history, as they see their Lord writing them with his own hand in the Lamb's book of life.

Now think on these things. Remember what is the real nature of sacrifice—namely, the giving up of what our souls hold dear, for love or duty, for our fellow-men or for God; that self-sacrifice is the highest of human virtues, peculiarly the virtue of Christianity—therefore of Christians; peculiarly the spirit of our Master—therefore what should be peculiarly the spirit of his followers. Remember that it may be shown in many varieties of form, in many degrees of excellence, in small things as well as great; by the boy who lifts up his little brother on his shoulder, as by the martyr who perishes at the stake. Remember that he who dies for the truth or the right dies a martyr—is a dying sacrifice; that he who gives up the natural desires of his life for the same cause, for truth or love or duty—

or who, for these, takes upon himself voluntarily some heavy burden, and so goes on to the grave in pain or darkness, in order that others may go on their way in joy and light—that man becomes a living sacrifice.

Remember, too, that the opportunity for exercising this spirit is afforded to all classes and conditions of men. None are so high or happy, none so privileged or great, that sacrifice, in some form or other, shall not be demanded of them. None are so lowly or so lonely that they cannot offer it. In the daily intercourse of life a thousand occasions will arise in which you may prefer another to yourself, give up to another, spare him pain and offer yourself as a little sacrifice for him. It may not be a great sacrifice. Great and small are relative terms, but if it be in the *spirit* of sacrifice it will be worthy of the disciple of Christ. Remember, too, that if you have the true spirit of sacrifice within you, you will not care to offer up your sacrifice upon the mountain-top, or to proclaim it in the ears of men, but you will be fully satisfied though it be offered in silence and darkness before the God who seeth in secret, but who, having seen, forgetteth *never*.

‘I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.’

ALMOST AND ALTOGETHER.

'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.'—

ACTS xxvi. 28.

OBERVE the different estimates which were formed by the two governors of the same man. Each judged him after his kind. Festus, I take it, was a low-minded man—selfish and worldly; he was accustomed, probably, to deal with men like himself; he had, therefore, a low estimate of men in general. Paul was to him a man like any other man, and he supposed him to be what he himself would have been if found talking in this manner, in this exalted strain, about these new gods and unintelligible doctrines, that is to say, either an audacious liar or an absolute madman. He was incapable of understanding Paul. No base man can form a true judgment or take a just measure of a noble, upright, high-minded man. What selfish, grasping gold-seeker, whose only idol is Mammon, could understand the nature of a man who would lay down his life for a cause? So, when Festus saw before him a man like Paul, and heard him pleading with boldness, earnestness, and power, the cause of humanity and Christ, he could not understand him.

But Agrippa was another sort of man. He was a Jew of Roman training, and his school of morality was Roman—his ideas of excellence and nobleness were Roman too. But he was a man, we must believe, of a

large and noble nature; and when he saw before him a man like Paul—bold, earnest, apparently truthful, risking his life for a cause that could bring nothing to himself, and pleading for that cause as if he were pleading for his own life—Agrippa had enough of Paul's own stuff in him to see that this was no common man, and these were not mere delusions that he was talking about. And so, while Festus could see nothing about Paul but that he was beside himself, Agrippa had the bravery to declare, before all that assembly of listening heathens, that the prisoner before him almost persuaded him to become a Christian.

'Almost.' Aye, there is the word that gives the point to the sentence. '*Almost.*' Not quite; not '*altogether.*' He had too much of the world in him yet, too much of self, too much of the old man, to declare himself as ready to become a true, hearty, and entire Christian. It would have been dangerous to his position as a king under the Roman government. It might have raised up enemies among his own people. It might have made difficulties of a thousand kinds, which he was not prepared to meet. This would have been foolish—and foolish he would not be. As long as he kept to the '*almost,*' he had committed himself to nothing; he had only spoken words; he was still where he had been before. It might be only a compliment to a noble prisoner. It was but a word—easily said and easily forgotten. But he was not going to descend from his throne, and take upon himself, instead, the yoke, and the shame, and the cross. *That* was not at all his notion. And thus, though by no means deaf to the arguments of Paul respecting Christ, he yet would not go any further towards the opening light of Christianity than '*almost thou persuadest me.*'

Now, that king Agrippa, before whose judgment-seat Paul then stood, is pictured before us, not merely as an isolated, individual man, but as a type of thousands, in

all times and nations; not only of those who stand without the pale of Christianity, but of thousands who call themselves by the name of Christ. If you take ten Christians, such as you see filling the churches and chapels of the land, eight or nine of them are probably very much in that state, as regards religion, which is truly expressed in these words of Agrippa. They are 'almost,' not 'altogether' persuaded. And why? Very much for the same reason which weighed with Agrippa—the 'altogether' would be too much for them. It would be too much to be required to give up *everything*, or to be ready to do so when duty calls for such a sacrifice; too much to live really according to the requirements of Christ; too much to be what we acknowledge we ought to be; too much to watch and wait, and deny ourselves, and subdue ourselves, and bring our whole man—body and soul—under entire subjection to the pure spirit and law of our great Master. We acknowledge, verbally, that we ought to do this; that He will ask us hereafter if we have tried to do this; but we cannot make up our minds to do it thoroughly—to present ourselves a living sacrifice on God's altar. We want, in short, to have both earth and heaven—the joys of both, the liberty of both; that is, the licence of the one and the true freedom of the other. We want to secure for ourselves an immortality of happiness beyond the grave; but we insist also upon a mortality as comfortable and prosperous and enjoyable as possible on this side of it. We should like to have what Christ has offered us; but we want to have it at our own price, not at his—or rather, we want to have it without paying any price at all. And if, like Ananias before the council of the Apostles, we come and lay down our offering at the feet of our Lord, saying, it is the whole offering of our heart, we lie before God. It is *not* the whole; we have not brought Him all; we have kept back part of the price—some cherished

pleasure ; some darling indulgence ; some long familiar habit ; some evil temper, not yet subdued ; some low desire, not yet cast out ; some unworthy idol, that yet sits upon its throne within our hearts. These and such as these, are the part of the price that we have kept back. We ask Him to give us *all* his blessing, and we only bring *a part* of the price. And we try to believe that He will not know, or that He will accept this false price, and will give us freely all that we ask of Him, while we render in return only so much as we find easy and convenient of that which He requires from us.

When Agrippa said, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,' he meant, 'Almost thou persuadest me to believe in Christ'—to acknowledge that belief, to accept the facts and the promises that Christianity placed before him. But when *we* speak of being Christians, we mean something more. To believe, or think we believe ; to profess ; to go to church and repeat the creed of Christendom ; all this does not make us Christians now. Time was, when to *profess* Christianity meant much. It meant that those who professed it submitted themselves to a new law, and were ready to lay down their lives for a new faith. It meant that they were ready to meet the wrath of man, and all that the wrath of man could bring ; to brave persecution, contempt, exile, imprisonment, and death, for the name and in the name of Christ. It means no such thing now. Too often it means only going with the multitude, doing as others do, being respectable, swimming with the stream. But this is not being even 'almost' a Christian. It is only being a conformist. To be truly a Christian is to live and feel and think in the spirit of Christ, to obey his law, and try to grow like him. He only who labours to do this is really a Christian.

Now, taking the word Christian in its larger and more meaning sense, I fear that many of us—most of us—do not even *try* for the 'altogether.' We are too

ready to be satisfied with the 'almost.' We stop where Agrippa stopped; and while Paul is pleading for the 'altogether,' we look at him as if he were talking of something quite unattainable. We try to satisfy ourselves with the 'almost,' because we think it will be easier than the 'altogether.' I do not believe that this is so. On the contrary, I believe that, if we only resolved to embrace it thoroughly, we should often find the 'altogether' to be practically the easier of the two, just because it is plainer, simpler, more clear to understand. The *whole* is the *whole*. A part may be *any* part. 'Almost' may be anywhere. It may be next door to 'Altogether'—it may be any number of doors off. When you say, 'I will do my duty so far as I see what my duty is,' it is all plain sailing. You know what it means; you know what your work is, and where it ends. But if you say, 'I will do as much of my duty as I find pleasant; as much as I find easy; as much as I can do without giving up something which I value more and in my heart love better,'—then there is no distinct line of demarcation between what is to be done, and what may with impunity be left undone. You do much or little, according as the hour of action finds you inclined to do; according as that hour finds you strong or weak, vigorous or weary, idle, vicious, or tempted. The 'almost' will probably die away into something farther and farther off the 'altogether,' until it will not, perhaps, bear the slightest relationship to it. And the man who has begun by not even intending to strive after the 'altogether,' but has satisfied himself with wishing for 'almost,' will end by finding that he cannot produce a creditable fragment or likeness of even *that*.

The 'altogether' is often more easy to strive after. Abstinence is found to be possible when temperance is unattainable, or at least, is unattained. To keep out of the way of sin entirely is more easy than to keep com-

pany with it for a little while, and then break off our connection with it. To forbear to taste is more easy than to moderate the draught. Who that has had any of the miserable experience of sin will pretend to believe that he can float for a while along the stream of sin, and at any moment he pleases steer his bark to shore? What blind madness is in such a venture! Do you fancy you can take a plunge over the falls of Niagara, and stop—when you are half way down?

And thus it is really more easy to try to be a Christian entirely than to try to be only half a Christian. Try, then, for the whole, and you have only one thing to do, namely, *all you can*. You have only one voice to listen to—the voice of conscience; only one law to obey—the law of God; only one thing to look to—the face of your Father in heaven. There is no confusion, no complication, no blowing of an uncertain sound upon the trumpet. Your eye is clear and single, and your path is plain.

In this case, too, you have only one enemy to fight against. There is no traitor in your camp, weakening your defences and betraying your counsels; your back is to the wall; your foe is before you; your foot is planted upon the rock. How much easier is a battle, even the fiercest, when you fight on such ground! Wishing for only half a victory, you would ensure defeat. And with ‘almost’ for your battle-cry, you would perish on that field where you might have stood a conqueror, if you had only lifted up your sword for ‘GOD AND ALTOGETHER!’

Again, it is of no use trying the ‘almost,’ because Christ will not accept it if we do. He has nothing to do with ‘almost;’ promises it nothing; never mentions it; ignores it utterly. This is not what he has set before us; this is not what he came into the world to teach; he nowhere says, ‘Come half-way to meet me, and I will give you rest;’ or, ‘He that doeth the will

of my Father just so far as it suits his pleasure or convenience, shall reap the reward of the faithful.' He makes no compromise with evil, but always points to the Highest and Best. Immeasurable as is the interval which lies between God and man, yet when he lifts the eye of man upward, he points to nothing short of God. 'Be ye also perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' It is always the 'altogether,' never the 'almost.'

But after the race is over, what then? Which of us can hope to have *achieved* the 'altogether'? Ah! after the race is over? Then, indeed, may mercy whisper, 'Mark not his shortcomings; almost he grew to be a Christian, and a true servant of God.' Aye, but did he *try* to be so 'altogether'? If he aimed high, it may be forgiven him that he shot low. If only he strove, the very weakness of humanity may plead for him, even though he often fell. But he must at least have run for the crown that was offered him, and towards the goal that was set before him—not for some lower prize, not for some goal of his own fixing.

A man who is a Christian, as Paul was, that is, a Christian not almost, but altogether, will serve God with his whole heart. For there are two kinds of service, and there are two kinds of servants. The one says, '*Must I?*' The other says, '*May I?*' One serves for hire; the other for love. One says, 'How much must I do for what I get?' The other asks, 'How much can I do for one to whom I owe so much?' One says, 'Which of the commandments have I broken?' The other says, 'I joy to do thy will, O Lord!'

Which of these two kinds must we be if we would be like Paul? If we would be amongst those servants who serve God for love rather than for hire, we must give Him our Best; we must give Him our Most; not grudgingly, but overflowing. We must put our *heart* into our work. Not for duty only must we do it; not

because we must ; not to escape punishment, or to win reward ; but because our whole heart is given to Him for whom we do the work.

Now a man of this stamp will not wait to give himself to God till he has nothing but the dregs of his life to bring to Him ; till he has lived for the world, and the things of the world, as long as he found he could get anything out of them, coming to Religion only when the world casts him off, and refuses to give him any more of its good and pleasant things. There are many, however, who do this. They come to God in their old age, when they see death approaching. They come in their sorrow, in their loneliness, in their desolation. They did not come in their sunshine, prosperity, and joy. They come to lay the poor worn-out fragments of their wasted being as an offering on that altar on which they ought to have laid their earliest, fairest, ripest fruits. What a return is this for all the mercies and invitations of our Heavenly Father ! He called to us in the early hours of life's morning, saying, ' My son, give me thy heart,' and we went away to serve other gods—to indulge our own vices and our own pleasures—and never thought of giving any answer to his invitation, till we had tried all other things and found them fail us ; and then we came back to Him, only because we found, after all, that we could not do anything better. Now, surely, to say the least of it, this is not very handsome behaviour. It is not what any man could do to another man, and expect, nevertheless, to be received by him at last. It is a mean, poor, base return for the mercies of our Heavenly Father—those mercies which even in our forgetfulness, our sin, and our rebellion, have never failed us.

Now, let the young think of this in the strength and the pride of their morning. Let them give to God their best, and strongest, and purest, and warmest, and most loving. Don't wait till you have nothing to give but

what is left of you. Come now, while the dew of your youth is upon you, while you can come in your strength and your beauty, and can *be* what you desire to be. In after years you will not find this so easy. Habits will have grown, character will have hardened; you will have fallen into the groove of life, and will find it very difficult to get out of that groove. Fill your minds *now* with good and noble thoughts; train yourselves now to all good and noble action. Try to think and to feel as you would if you were now sitting, with the sight of the eye and with the hearing of the ear, at the feet of our Master—Christ. Act, live, as if his eye were continually upon you, as if his spirit had possession of your heart. When you read of good men, of those giants of their race who stand out above the dull level of humanity like stars of the first magnitude among the dimmer lights of heaven, think how glorious it would be to be such as they. It is true, you may never be able to rise to their stature; yet try to be of their quality, so that hereafter, when you shall meet them in the spirit-land, they may acknowledge you as brothers, inasmuch as you, too, have been worshippers of the Great and Good, of the Holy and the True; inasmuch as you, like them, have not been satisfied to rest in the ‘almost,’ but have watched and prayed, and fought and suffered, in the pursuit of the ‘altogether.’ Be this. Do this. Seek this. And even now, as I speak these exhortations in your ears, let your hearts reply to me—mingling the words of Agrippa with the answer of Paul—‘Not *almost*, but *altogether*, thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’

LOST OPPORTUNITIES.

'If thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.'—
LUKE xix. 41, 42.

LOST opportunities! that is our subject. Jerusalem had lost her opportunity—the greatest that had ever been offered to an earthly city had been offered to this city of David, and she had rejected it. Jesus had come to his own, and his own had not received him. She might have acknowledged him as her Lord, and he would have saved her from destruction. She might have listened to his words, and he would have given her a new life. She might have turned to God with her whole heart, and welcomed his messenger, and God would still have acknowledged her as the city of his people, as the 'joy of the whole earth.' The golden opportunity stood before that unrepenting city—paused, waited, even asked to be seized upon; entreated, knocked at the door, saying, 'Why will ye die?'

But the door remained shut. The people hardened their heart against the call of God; turned a deaf ear to the gentle voice of his messenger; were about to crucify him who came to save them, and to pronounce upon themselves that curse which seems to this day to cling to them, 'His blood be upon us and upon our children!'

On the hill of Calvary, on the day of the crucifixion, the brightest opportunity ever offered to a people was

not only allowed to pass, was not only spurned and rejected, but was quenched in the blood of the innocent. 'Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!'

That is a most melancholy and mournful hour for any really thoughtful or religious-minded man, when, towards the evening of his days, he looks back over the way he has trodden, and counts up all the lost opportunities of his life; when he marks this occasion or that, when some golden chance was offered of rising towards some higher social or intellectual or moral position among his fellows—of gaining some important advantage, of winning some valuable prize, of mounting towards some desired height, which in all his years of life he has never reached, and which he has now given up all hope of reaching. He looks at these things now with a clearer eye than he did then; and he perceives many things that he might have done, but did not do; much he might have learnt, but did not learn; much that he might have been, but never has become; grievous mistakes he was warned against, but yet fell into; aims he set before him, yet has never hit; golden opportunities that he let pass by, and did not seize, and which have left no trace behind them but the memory of occasions lost. What man can turn the telescope of truth over the backward landscape, and not behold it saddened, clouded, stained, by these melancholy shadows of the past—these mournful voices that follow us with their reproaches and lamentations, and anticipate, by their tormenting, the retributions that lie yet hidden behind the veil!

Truly, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;' and that which he doth *not* sow, neither shall he reap. And the reaping time often comes before the expected season of the harvest. And there are furrows where the stems bend, waving with golden grain; and

there are furrows where only tares and weeds are growing ; and there are other furrows where no seed of any kind is springing—gaps of emptiness yawning across the field because no seed of any kind was cast there. There are the furrows of lost opportunities—furrows which were open to receive the grain, but wanted the hand of the husbandman to cast it there. And so we look, with eyes full of tears, over this harvest-field of our life, and, dwelling on these empty spaces, exclaim, ‘ Oh ! that we had known in that, our day, in that sowing day, that seed-time of our lives, the things that belonged to our peace ! ’ But now it is hid from our eyes. The seed-time is past. We cannot roll back the months and recall the spring. It is gone, gone—swept into the irrevocable past.

There is not one in this assembly who, if he looks back over the years of life that are already past with a thoughtful and discerning eye, will not see many of these empty furrows, these lost opportunities. Some of you are going down the shady side of the hill now. You look back to your youth, and you recall some opportunity for gaining knowledge which you let pass by. There was a Sunday-school to go to, and you did not go there. There were books to read, and you did not read them. There were better men than you, and wiser, from whom you might have learnt much good, but you did not seek their company. There were hours which you might have made profitable, but you wasted them in doing nothing. Every one of these was an opportunity which you lost. If you had them again, you think you would seize them eagerly, and turn them to account. But they do not come again, and an hour or an opportunity lost is lost for ever. Or there was some bright chance of making yourself a better man, a more religious man, an opportunity of acquainting yourself with God, of taking his service upon you ; and you let it go by. Christ was knocking at your door, and you did not listen. He knocked again, and though

you heard him, you did not rise, eagerly, and gratefully, and joyfully, to open the door, and to welcome him to your heart's best corner. He stood there for a little while, and then passed on from this closed door, and you heard his retiring footsteps, and they sounded reproachful, like a sad farewell, and seemed to say, 'Oh, that thou hadst known !'

You have often thought of that time since—thought of it with remorse, almost with terror, and you have said, 'Oh, if he would come again and stand at my door, it should be different !'

Well, perhaps he will, if you ask him. But you must seek *him* now ; he sought *you* then. It is rather for you to go and stand now at *his* door and knock.

You may remember a time when you ought to have been kind to somebody—a neighbour, a sister, a mother, perhaps, who had watched over *you*, and you did not give back that loving care, and she died, and the opportunity was gone ! You did love her more than you thought, but only found it out when the time for showing it was past, and the time for sorrows and remorse was come. Again you cry, 'Oh, that I had known !'

And day by day these opportunities are passing. They come and they go. They say, 'Here we are ; do you want us ? Take us then, quick ; or we pass away. We are birds of passage, ever on the wing. Ere you can say, "What is your form and value ? are you worth seizing ?"—we are gone !'

Now in order that, in the time to come, we may have our eyes more open to these golden chances, and not let them slip by us, as they have so often done, and in order that those who have life still before them may not fail to seize upon the many such that will be offered them, let us well consider this matter, the real value of an opportunity.

Youth is the great season of opportunities. It is the time to gain knowledge ; to fill the mind with spirits of

goodness, that shall drive out the evil ones ; to form valuable habits ; to mould, temper, and harden the character ; to determine the future man, his line of action, and his tone of character. It is the sowing time.

If a young man could only look forward to the time when he will be old ; if he could look at all his opportunities now, as he certainly will then, he would not let them slip away as he does. But unfortunately he does *not* look forward. He knows not the value of these priceless hours. He is like a savage or a reckless madman, into whose hand sovereign after sovereign is being told by some rich friend, and who, instead of laying them by or using them wisely, is playing ducks and drakes with them. He does not know what they are ! The sovereigns are to him as oyster-shells. Some day he will know their value, but then they will not be his.

Perhaps some of you know a father who has fixed his heart and hopes on his boy. He does what he can for him ; provides means of education for him ; surrounds him, so far as he can, with good influences ; makes an opening for him in life, and gives him all the counsel his own experience suggests for his guidance. But the youth is not willing to be guided. He neglects the counsel ; he lets the opportunities slip by ; he thinks he knows best—that the world is changed since his father's day, and so on. And his father in sorrow watches him going downwards instead of upwards, altogether on the wrong road, the road of sorrow, and pain, and of possible degradation and ruin. Or, if not going towards sin or destruction, he is at least not advancing towards that high position in life and character which he might have attained. The mountain of life is before him, the mountain of power, of reputation, of usefulness, where he might stand as a brother and an equal among the best of his race in their high, pure, ennobling companionship. But he does not climb the mountain. He is satisfied with mediocrity, when he

might rise to eminence ; to enjoy easily, instead of doing greatly ; to drift along the stream of life, and let it carry him where *it* will, instead of spreading his sail, and plying his oar, and steering his own course whither *he* will. He is content to be ignorant, when he might fill his mind with knowledge ; to follow, where he might lead ; to be lost in the crowd, when he might stand out among the foremost.

And, moreover, he feels neither remorse nor fear, for he sees only the present. The prophetic eye, which scans the future also, is not his. But his father, who has himself been what his son is now, and who is now suffering what he knows his boy will suffer, looks upon this blighting of promise, this throwing away of chances, with feelings of bitter and helpless grief ; and, foreseeing both what might be and what will be, he exclaims, ' Oh, that thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace ! '

Is there no way of awakening the young to the importance of this subject ? *Must* it be that we grow wise only when it is too late to use wisdom ? that we see our opportunities only when it is of no use seeing them ? Must an angel visit us, and we not know that such a heavenly visitant was here till we see the wave of his departing wing ? Oh, let not this be ! We *can* seize these opportunities if we are awake to the danger and the grief of letting them slip by. ' Awake, then, thou that sleepest ! ' Do think of these things ! Do seize the hours and occasions of good ! Watch for them ; catch them ; hold them fast ; let them not go till they have blessed you !

And what I say to the young I say to all ; for, regarding ourselves as immortal beings, we are all young, all on the threshold of life. Look round, each one of you, where you stand, and see if there be not some opportunity now before you waiting for you to seize it. Is there no opportunity, or can you not make one—for

they will come often if called—for filling your mind with some sort of useful knowledge? Is there no opportunity of making some desired change in your family habits? Is there no opportunity of helping a neighbour, or of forwarding a good cause?

Perhaps you are in trouble. Some great sorrow has fallen upon you; your day is darkened for awhile; the light of your life is gone. You ask, why is this trouble sent? What does God's angel say? He tells you it is a loosening of the silver cord. He speaks to you of the great hereafter. He exhorts you *now*, while your heart is softened, and your pride is broken, and your eyes are opened, to draw near to God, to acquaint yourself with Him, to speak more to Him, to purify yourself, that you may be fit to stand in his presence. He tells you that God chastens those He loves, and is ready, waiting, to love those He chastens. He tells you this is a great opportunity, that God is speaking to you, and you must listen. This is an opportunity for learning to know God, and for looking deep into the spiritual world.

Or, God sends another of his dark angels; you are laid on the bed of sickness and pain. Here is another opportunity for good. Let it not pass by unused! If you murmur, or lie sullenly suffering, you will lose the chance that is offered you. But bear your cross with patience and resignation, and remember God blesses those who bear, as well as those who do, his will. His object is to make us better, to develop our powers—some by work, some by suffering. He purifies us by fire, and terribly it burns sometimes! But if we will seize the fiery opportunity, we may find it a great one. It does for us what nothing else can do; and when it is passed, how soon it will be forgotten! We shall not *then* reproach God for having made us pass through the fire, but songs of joy will be mingled with our hearts' thanksgiving. 'Bless the Lord, O my soul;' 'It is indeed good for me that I have been afflicted.'

But perhaps you have not had the cross of illness to bear; another blow has fallen upon you. You have lost this world's goods. The fruits of years of industry have been torn from you, possibly by the fault of others. Oh brother, murmur not! revile not! judge not! hate not! Bear manfully, as Job did, with the dignified resignation of one to whom the Lord gave what now He has taken away. Remember, in a little while it will be the same to you whether you lost or won these things. These are not happiness, though they may be blessings. Meet the trial well; the loss you have sustained will soon be worth more to you than if you had become the master of thousands. Embrace the opportunity offered you, though it appear an angel of darkness. Bring yourself to say, 'His will be done!' and even as you clasp it, it will brighten into an angel of light!

There is one great opportunity given to every one. This earthly life of ours is itself the greatest of opportunities—one for winning a heavenly life. This is the prize. It will not be forced upon us, not wasted on those who care not for it; but we are offered a chance of winning it. And, friends, '*now* is the accepted time.' Now is the opportunity for making ourselves what Christ says we must be before we can either possess or enjoy his blessedness, before we can enter into his kingdom. When the time comes for entering, then the time for preparation will have passed. If we have lost our opportunities, we may then stand at the door and knock in vain. They only who have Christ's mark upon them can enter. We may cry, 'Lord, Lord! open to us!' But we hear a voice which has often spoken to us before, but which *then* we had not listened to—a voice which had once spoken in tones of tender invitation, but now speaks in judgment and rejection—'I never knew you; depart from me, ye that cast away your opportunities, ye that worked iniquity.'

My friends, if this should ever be our lot—if we

should ever find ourselves shut out into the outer darkness before that gate of light—how bitterly, how despairingly, shall we look back on that great opportunity lost, that opportunity of earthly life, and cry, 'Oh, that we had known, in that our day, the things that belonged to our peace! but now——!'

And there will come a time when we shall see all these opportunities with a very clear eye. We do not see them now, because blinded by the glare, and the tumult, and the eager pursuit, and the storms of passion, and the total want of experience and of wisdom. But we shall see them in that awful hour. The life that is gone will pass before us in review, and many things we see not now will come out of the darkness and stand before us in terrible distinctness and reality. Sins we heed not now will make themselves felt then. They seem mere trifles now, but they will look great enough then.

When the *Ocean Queen* was wrecked in the Gulf of Mexico, one of the poor creatures on board was saved, after floating about for days, supported upon a hen-coop. He related afterwards some of his experiences during those terrible days and nights. Amongst other things, he told how, when his strength was well-nigh gone, when he had no longer power even to *think*, and life seemed to be ebbing fast to its close, his boyish days came up as a picture before him. Passages of his life, that had been utterly forgotten by him, passed in review before him, and he seemed to be living them over again; and scenes and sounds that belonged to forty years ago were again present. A verse of a hymn that he had learned at his mother's knee—that beginning, 'God moves in a mysterious way'—seemed to be repeated over and over in his ear. He saw himself, as a boy, secretly helping himself to some grapes which his mother had put aside for a sick sister, and he heard distinctly his mother's voice, as she asked him, gently

and sorrowfully, 'Johnnie, did you take those grapes?'

Now this is a true story. It is in such hours as these that recollections of lost opportunities rise, like the ghosts of murdered victims, and pass before us in grim and mournful procession—large, distinct, and melancholy. 'Here we are,' they say, 'risen from the dead to meet you. We met you once, when, if you had embraced us, you would have found that you had clasped an angel. But you scorned us then, you saw us not, or you thought we should come again, and often, but we never came; and now we are but the ghosts of *what might have been*. Oh, that ye had known!'

And now, my friends, while it is yet day, while our fate is still in our hands, while this great opportunity of life is ours—is pausing, is passing before us—let us awake to a consciousness of its presence, of its value, of its offers, of its fleetness. And all the smaller opportunities—of improving ourselves, of doing kind things, and of saying kind things to those we love or those among whom our lot is cast—let them not pass away and leave no blessing. Let us embrace them while they are angels, not wait to meet them till they arise before us as shapes of darkness. Let us embrace them while they will bless us, not wait till they have only reproaches to utter. For remember, if we do not seize them *now*, then in the hour of death and in the day of judgment they will seize us. There is no such thing as forgetting. We may forget for awhile, but we shall remember *after* awhile. Secret sins, neglected duties, tender hearts wounded, fellow-creatures wronged—all these leave terribly long memories; and when we think they are all forgotten and buried, they rise up again out of their grave to tell over to us the early history of our lives; and mournful echoes come pealing from afar, which say, 'Thou didst it!' 'Thou art the man!'

Let us look to ourselves therefore now; and that

God may acknowledge us then, let us serve Him now ;
that Christ may confess us then, let us confess and
follow in his footsteps now ; so that we may not hear
then that sorrowful word, 'Oh that thou hadst known,
in that thy day, the things that belonged to thy peace !'

CHRISTIANITY A SPIRIT, NOT A LAW.

'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.'—ROMANS viii. 14.

TO my mind, these words are very significant ; they are large, deep, comprehensive ; they express in a single sentence the principle and character of our religion. What is it that they say ? Not, as many as obey the written law of God, as many as tremble at the name of God, as many as believe this or that about the nature and government of God, but, as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. This not only expresses a wider principle and definition, but also points to a much higher form of religion than a law ; it speaks to man's nature in a much more advanced stage of its growth and development. A law is made for those who can understand only a command : 'Thou shalt'—'Thou shalt not'—'Do this and live, do that and die.' It is for those who can obey the command, but are not capable of entering into the reason of the command, or the counsels of Him who issues it. When a father begins the education of his child, he tells the child what it *must* do ; when that child grows to be a son, the father tells him more—unfolds to him the principles of his own life, its plan and objects and purposes. He no longer says, 'Do this because I command you,' but, 'My guiding principle and purpose is this—knowing this, and desirous to pursue my objects and maintain

my principles, you will judge for yourself how to act, how to apply the principles to each particular emergency as it may arise. I breathe my spirit into you, but I leave no law written upon stone.' This is a much higher step in education, speaks to a more advanced nature than the other. The men of the law are the *little children* of God; when they act and live in the spirit of God, seek to know the mind of God, fulfil his purposes and pray to be permitted to be labourers in his vineyard, they become the *sons* of God.

Now this is just what took place in the religious education of the Jewish people. Moses laid down in the law very precise and particular directions about all manner of things, secular, political, and religious. It was always, 'Thou shalt,' and 'Thou shalt not.' The Ten Commandments are an example of this. It was always what they were to do, or not to do; the inner spirit was left almost untouched; if a man observed all the commandments of the law, he was blameless. Christ left the law behind him, and passed on to the sources of all law. He taught his disciples to *be*, that being, they might *do*; he touched the springs of the moral life, he spoke to the spirit of man and thereby lifted him to God.

Observe what it is that Christ aims at in all his teachings. He finds men in a certain state in their religious education; he sees their difficulty in receiving spiritual ideas, in rising to the height which it is absolutely necessary to attain in order to look into the spiritual world which he was trying to open to their view. In order to lift them to this height, he does not issue fresh commands, to do this or that, perform a certain ceremony, or keep holy a certain day, or repeat a certain prayer. This would only be multiplying the commandments of the law, keeping them in the same groove. But he tried to infuse the spirit from which all good acts would flow, not to command the actions, but

to cultivate the mind and temper which would naturally lead to the actions. His object was to purify the fountain, knowing that then the stream also would be pure. He does not seek to make grapes grow on thorns, but to turn the thorn into a vine, then grapes will grow upon it naturally. He does not command a worldly man to do the works of the Spirit, but he makes the worldly man into a spiritual man, knowing that then he will do those works naturally. He lays his hand straight upon the heart, knowing that out of the heart proceed all the actions that make a man and determine his character. He tries to make men just, that they may do just things; generous, that they may do generous things; merciful, that they may do merciful things. He does not command each individual deed, but gives the spirit, and leaves that to produce the works.

And how does Christ do this? He talks with his disciples, lives with them, draws them near to him, reveals himself to them. He unfolds to them such truths, or parts of truths, as they are capable of comprehending, opens their understandings, points their path. He teaches them to look upwards and onwards. He makes them acquainted with their true relation towards God, and fills them with the Spirit of God, so far as their small vessels are able to receive it. The Spirit enters into them, inspires them, enlightens them, warms them, elevates them, lifts them nearer to God, makes them able to become the servants of God, to labour in their Master's vineyard, to work and speak and live for him, to lay down their lives for his sake. Thus it was that the poor, humble fishermen of Galilee became apostles, martyrs, saints, burning and shining lights through all future ages and nations of the world.

As Christians—and not under the law—our task is to strive to get the right spirit; then it will be easy and natural to do the right thing. If we have the Spirit of Christ, we shall think, feel, act, and live as Christians.

The yoke will be easy; no burden will be felt in an obedience that is the natural outcome of a Christian heart.

Look at the style of action of a man who is thoroughly imbued with this spirit. He does not wait for orders, does not ponder over the grounds of each separate duty, but following the promptings of his heart, goes right on to his work; he strikes with his heart in his hand, throws his whole strength into his task, gives himself to it; he does not think how little may be required, but only how much may be done; he works as one under the Spirit, and not as one under the law. Having the Spirit of God, he sees things with the eye of God, and weighs them in the balances of God. He judges actions and characters by God's standard, not by the world's standard. He does not ask whether this or that is prudent, but whether it is right—not whether it may not be dangerous or hurtful to himself, but only whether it is what God's Spirit will approve. God has touched his eyes; he has received his sight, the sight of a son of God, who knows between good and evil; and seeing thus and always acting according to the sight, his way is clear before him. The mists and doubtings and tiny storms of common life he sees indeed—does not ignore—but he sees them below him, for he stands upon the holy hill of God, far above them all.

This spirit admits of infinite variety of manifestation. There is no stereotyped pattern among the sons of God. A family likeness? yes; for the same Spirit has been poured upon them all. But it is a garment of grace that fits itself to every variety of character, and allows free development and action of mind and limb. It clothes with equal beauty the timid and the brave, the weak and the strong, the fast runner and the slow, in life's race. God pours out his Spirit upon his sons, and each receives it in his own vessel, and it fills it—whether large or small—and shines through it without

changing its form or shape, only it makes it more beautiful of its kind. God says: 'Receive my Spirit, be my son, and you may be anything else—a king, a statesman, or a labourer, a strong man or a weak man, a great or a small man, in the valley of life or on its mountain, in the cottage or on the throne—if you have the Spirit of God, you are the son of God.'

It is this peculiarity of Christianity that makes it adapted for every time and nation of the world. If it were a law, a religion of ceremony and observance, it would pass away with the people and the time; but being a Spirit, it has the power of entering into all forms, in all ages, and suiting itself to all individual wants, and to all possible conditions of the world. It has supplied the spiritual wants of men under every variety of character and condition. It is as much to us now as it was to the disciples of the early Church. It touches humanity at all points, and adapts itself to all needs.

Did you ever think how God makes a river? He does not scoop out a channel here and a channel there, or trace the courses of a hundred rivulets, or roll away the rocks out of the valley, or rend asunder the everlasting mountains. No! He fills the fountain that lies deep buried in the caverned hills, fills it to fulness, to overflowing, with his living water, and then sends it forth upon its way, rejoicing in its strength, singing its young song of gladness, to make its own course along a thousand channels to the sea. He does not say to the poured-out waters, 'Flow here, or flow there,' but, 'Flow on.' He supplies the element; but the particular form it may assume, the particular channel it may follow, He seems to heed not. He leaves that to be determined by the character of the country through which it may pass. It may flow on gently, with quiet manners. It may rush along in the foaming torrent, or fall headlong amid the thunders of the cataract, or bear upon its placid bosom

the fleets of commerce, or spread its fertilizing waters over the thirsty plain. What matter? It is everywhere the water from God's fountain. Everywhere it feeds, fertilizes, does its work. Everywhere it is the water God pours forth to bless and beautify the world. So it is with the Spirit. Once given, it takes a thousand forms, but on all of them is the mark of God.

How are we to get this Spirit? First, by obedience to the law. While we are children we must do as we are bid. Obedience is the parent of many good things. From obeying the law, we must pass on to sharing the Spirit. To do this, we must seek Him from whom come both the law and the Spirit—seek Him in the Scriptures, where so much has been written concerning Him by those of his children who have sought Him most—seek Him in our own thoughts—above all, seek Him in prayer. Prayer is the channel of communication between God and man. It is in prayer that we draw nigh to Him; it is in prayer that his Spirit descends upon us. When this Spirit fills and permeates our whole nature, then have we become sons of God; and in proportion as it does this, so far do we become his sons. Without that, nothing can make us so; no names, professions, observances, sacrifices, attendances, beliefs, can avail us anything. But in earnest, deep-felt prayer does this Spirit come to us more than by any other means; that is, if our prayers are real ones, not merely words and passing feelings, but prayers backed by deeds, and translated into our lives. The power of such prayer to mould man into the divine image is undreamt of by those to whom this seeking is unknown.

CHARACTER CHANGED BY CIRCUMSTANCES.

'Is thy servant a dog?'—2 KINGS viii. 13.

IN the East the dog is looked upon with contempt and aversion; this is shown by the use of the word throughout the Scriptures, as in the proverb, 'A living dog is better than a dead lion;' it is also illustrated by the Mohammedan treatment of the dog as an unclean animal. Among ourselves, on the contrary, there is no animal more esteemed than the dog, as the faithful, intelligent, and affectionate companion of man. Observe the change of character this proves in the dog. To produce this, nothing was necessary but a change of circumstances. It is often so among men; and we find scriptural illustrations of the truth in David, Solomon, and Peter.

As a young man, who so good and beautiful as David? modest, brave, generous, patient, loving, graceful, obedient, religious, ready to forgive, charitable to interpret, returning good for evil, and answering the persecuting hatred of Saul with faithful loyalty and untiring forbearance. He was the pattern of all that we should wish a young man to be. All that was good in him was not torpid or negative, but very full of life. He was overflowing good and beautiful, entirely trustful towards God, knowing his own place, and quietly taking it. Except, perhaps, Moses, he was the most complete and noble specimen of his race—'a man after God's own heart.'

But whence came David—where do we first find him? On the hills of Bethlehem keeping sheep—not amid the luxury of palaces, nor appearing as one who had been surrounded from childhood with slaves and attendants, to watch for his childish will, and listen to every little cry of anger, and thus spoil a nature originally made for good. No; but alone upon the hill-side, with his sheep for his companions, the staff and sling for his weapons, his own little head and hand for his protection, a crust for his dinner, the well of water for his drink, the sheepskin for his clothing, his father's home for his nightly refuge, his mother's love and caresses for his reward,—such were the schoolmasters and nurses of this gallant child. Hardship, temperance, solitude, and comparative neglect, were his instructors. He grew like a young sapling of the forest, like the palm-tree of the desert, not like the hothouse plant of modern civilization. Had he been born a king, he would never have been the king he became. But being hardened and disciplined by the wholesome influences of his shepherd life, the youngest of a large family, he grew to be much greater than a king, to be a NOBLE MAN.

Such was David when Samuel found him, when Saul called him to play upon his harp and charm away the melancholy spirit that sat upon the heart of the King of Israel. Such was he when he went to meet Goliath, and when he lifted up his voice to sing the praises of his God in Psalms which even to these distant days are the wonder and consolation of mankind.

Who shall not fall, if David fell? Who is safe, if David was not secure from deadly sin? What prophet would have been believed who should have prophesied to him the crimes he would afterwards perpetrate? 'Am I a dog?' he might indeed have answered. But so it was. No longer a shepherd, no longer a younger son, he became a king; thrones and cities went down

before him, tribes of people became subject to his power ; he spoke only to command ; with his attendants, to hear was to obey. *Now* no one contradicted him, no one thwarted him, his brothers no more told him of the haughtiness of his heart, or of the pride that took him to the field ; he was lord of all, monarch of all he surveyed. Circumstances had changed, and he was changed. He had found himself able to do so much, that he thought he could do anything. He had been so good, that he had almost thought nothing could be evil, if he did it. And it was not till Nathan came and presented before him the picture of a base and cruel man, and then told him that *he* was that very man, that he saw what it was that he had actually done.

So with Solomon ; though he was born a king, how wise and good was his youth ; how beautiful was his first prayer ; and yet what a melancholy close his life had ! Wise as he was, his wisdom was not proof against the influence of general admiration, the corruption of flattery, the injurious effect of a consciousness of personal superiority and unbounded despotic power, and the allurements of sensual pleasure. His wisdom proved to be only a theory, not the practical wisdom that maketh wise unto salvation ; it afforded no security for continued virtue, no assurance that he would endure unto the end. His day rose in unclouded glory ; it set amid clouds and gloom.

So again with Peter. 'Though all men betray thee, yet will not I,' were the words of the zealous disciple ; but he had indeed fallen when, in the agony of remorse, he shrank from his Master's gaze, and 'went out and wept bitterly.'

All history affords like examples. Men have been strong and virtuous, while working their way through difficulty, neglect, and trial ; but when the circumstances have changed, they have shown how much their virtue depended upon circumstances. In the storm they were

brave; in the sunshine they melted away like snow. This is the point I want to turn your attention to. It is not a story of the past only. Every day furnishes new examples of the melancholy truth. We ourselves, perhaps, think we are virtuous because we love virtue; we may find it is only because we wish to be respectable. We desire to stand well with our neighbours; to be highly thought of by those about us; we fear the opinion of our fellows, or respect it, and therefore bow to it and obey it. There is no harm in this desire to obtain respect and love; but if this is our only motive, if we do right *only* in order to secure the respect and love of men, then let us not flatter ourselves that our virtue is founded upon a rock.

Few of us are aware how much of our good behaviour depends upon the pressure of public opinion. We are under recognizances. If we act in a certain way, we shall be punished by the general voice of condemnation. Or, if we do so to others, they will do so to us. Or, it is very pleasant to be thought well of by our neighbours, to have a good name and reputation, the respect of all men, the esteem of our friends. We do not consider, perhaps do not know, how much of our good conduct rests entirely on these motives. But when those motives act no longer, when we go to another part of the world, or are among strangers, where no one knows us, where we care about no one, we often find our love of virtue growing cold, our self-control becoming weak, our evil propensities no longer restrained. Various little habits we had been obliged to suppress are now allowed their own way; we become selfish, disagreeable, careless of the comfort of others, thinking only of our own. We think we are alone, no eye is upon us, we may do as we like, no one will think the worse of us, or bring us to shame for what we do. And so we do it; the right and the wrong of the deed is no longer thought of, but only our

reputation. This shows on what a foundation of sand our virtue rests—not on the rock that shall never be moved, but on the loose sand that shifts continually. ‘What will people say?’ is before us, instead of, ‘What will God think?’ Our virtue depends upon the place, and time, and company, not upon the eternal laws of Right. We bend our principles to our practice, instead of judging our practice by our principles. We become men-pleasers, and have no longer any claim to be the servants of the God of Truth. Time was when, if any warning prophet had told us what we should hereafter do when the eye of the public was no longer upon us, we should have said, ‘Am I a dog?’ He might have replied, ‘The Lord hath showed me thou shalt be removed from the influence of that public opinion which is really thine only law, and then thou shalt do this thing.’

Some one may have once thought himself good-tempered, cheerful, sunny, and contented; he had always lived in sunshine, with a healthy constitution, prosperous circumstances, comforts, pleasures, friends, all sorts of happy surroundings. But times change, and there come to him sickness, embarrassments, difficulties, privations, disappointments, poverty. Then he becomes anxious, irritable, selfish, fearful, and repining. The sunshine was not in him, but on the outer world around him. Again: a man is born in poverty, learns to be industrious, brave, thankful for small mercies: he shows that there is iron in him. But he rises in the world, becomes rich and prosperous; and then perhaps he shows himself, in his altered circumstances, indolent, luxurious, and exacting. His son, who is born rich, begins by being proud, selfish, and idle. You say he is not like what his father was at his age. No; his father had to make his way, the son has his way made for him. Their different circumstances make them different men.

We sometimes see a man falling into sin under the pressure of some trial or temptation that we do not

happen to have met with, the force of which therefore we do not know. We have no idea that to us there could be any peril in it, that to us it could have any power to mislead, or blind, or conquer. We therefore heed it not, take no care, use no precautions, feel no fear. If any warning voice should say, 'Watch, prepare, strengthen thyself against the coming danger,' we should reply, 'Am I a dog? Could such a thing hurt me? I feel no desire, no weakness, no danger.' Then suddenly the enemy approaches, comes all unawares, shows himself in his strength in some unthought-of form; and we, not thinking such an enemy could harm us, find all at once that we too are vulnerable to his poisoned weapons, and we fall even before we know that we are struck, just because we thought that here at least there was no danger. As long as we are men we are subject to trial and temptation; and as Achilles with all his strength could be wounded to death in his heel, so even the strongest of us has some weak place in his moral armour, some point on which he needs especial care and watchfulness.

What, then, are the lessons we should learn from these acknowledged facts?

I. Not to think too well of ourselves; not to dwell upon the few good points we may have about us; priding ourselves upon their strength, feeling sure that because in that quarter at least we are safe, we can therefore never fall. We are never so safe that we may slumber or be careless, or be unmindful of our weakness, or rest secure in our supposed virtue. Better men than we have fallen, and we cannot afford to mock at the arrow that has slain them.

II. Do not let us be too sure that what we see or think to be good in us rests on the only true foundation—that is, the love of good and right for its own sake, so that under all circumstances, and in all times and all places, we should hold fast to our integrity.

Perhaps under other circumstances than the present ones we should be other men than we are. For instance, our religion might be found to be dependent on the encouragement and companionship of our neighbours, or on our connection with some particular religious body, some church or chapel, in which we happen to have been instructed, or to which we happen to be attached. When we are removed to some other place, no longer hearing the same voices, or being surrounded by the same visible associations, we may find we have left our religion behind us, that it was a thing not within us and belonging to us, a part of our very selves, but only a thing outside of us, belonging to the place, or the people, or the Sunday; so that in leaving the scene of our religious life we have left the life itself, and our spirits are exiles from the home which they once thought they could never desert. And I say this, not only to warn you against pride, and self-delusion, and a false estimate of your own character, but also to remind you of the necessity of having some better foundation for goodness than that vague, general conformity to public opinion which really is often the only root of men's good conduct. If you do right only when the eyes of men are upon you, then you are the servants of men, their slaves and sycophants. Before God you are hypocrites, professing allegiance to Him and paying it to his creature. And you become so by being more familiar with men than with God, thinking more of them and their opinion, and their power to help or harm you, than you think of God; fearing them more, feeling yourself more dependent upon them, and having a nearer, closer relation with them. If you were accustomed to live more with God, to consult Him more, to pray to Him more, to look up to Him more, to draw near to Him more, to live as in his sight, to try to obey Him, comprehend his purposes, and look at all things from 'His holy hill'—if, in short, God sat upon the

throne of your heart instead of the fear of men sitting there—then your virtue would have a deeper foundation; your religion would be a part of yourself, would go with you where you go, and be with you where you dwell—here or at the other side of the world—in joy or sorrow, in sickness or health, in life or death, on earth or in heaven.

WISHING IS NOT WILLING.

'Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'—MATTHEW xv. 28.

'Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.'—
MATTHEW v. 16.

BE it unto thee even as thou wilt.' The point and strength of these words of Jesus, as very often happens, lies in *one* of them. Not, 'as thou *wishest*,' 'as thou wouldst desire,' 'as thou *askest*,' but, 'as thou *wilt*.' Here is the point of the story; and it is from this thought that I wish now to speak to you.

Looking at mankind with this thought in our minds, we may divide them into two classes. There are not only the good and the bad, but there are also the weak and the strong. On one hand we see men with warm desires, earnest purposes, fixed determination, resolute will; on the other hand we see men who desire nothing strongly, will nothing strongly, have nothing strong or determinate about them. They drift along the stream of life, letting it just carry them where *it* will, not where *they* will. They do not make their own path; they follow that which is made for them. One may almost say they have no will at all. The thing nearest to a *will* that they ever reach is a *wish*. They may have great powers, vast knowledge, warm hearts, wide, enlightened minds; but they want this one faculty—a strong will, a determined purpose. They cannot or do not choose to concentrate their whole mind and strength upon any

one purpose, to pay the price of their whole being for one pearl. Perhaps they think it hardly worth such cost. They pursue many things, yet they pursue none strongly; they have not even very strong desires about anything. Their constitution is of soft and flexible texture. These are not generally the successful men in any line of action; they are not the men who leave their mark upon the world. They *will* nothing: therefore Providence says to them, 'Thou shalt *have* nothing.'

On the other hand there are men who when once they have set their minds upon a thing, whether good or bad, give no rest to their souls till they have attained it. They throw their whole strength into the pursuit. You would think it was a matter of life and death to them; they care not for difficulties, or toil, or danger, so that they can only gain this. They do not *wish*—they *will*. They are ready to pay any price, but they must have the thing; and, as I say, there is no peace for them or anybody about them till they have got it.

Now we know that God puts men's destiny very much in their own hands, and our general experience of life is, that though the race is not always to the swift or the battle to the strong, yet generally it is so, as regards the things of this world. The strong man, in any line, will mostly carry off the prizes from the weak one. And by the strong man I do not mean the man gifted with the greater powers, but the man gifted with the strongest will, who puts whatever powers he has to the fullest and most profitable use. Have you not seen a man beginning life at the very bottom of life's ladder, and yet, by labour, thrift, self-denial—by giving up his whole soul and body to the pursuit of gain, to success in his business—have you not seen such a man rise and take his place among the rich ones of the earth? You may say that after all he has not got what was worth the very high price he has paid for it; that if he had given some of his energy to self-education and doing

good to others, he would have made a happier bargain. It may be so ; but the thing he laboured for and denied himself for, that thing he has got. 'He has his reward'—the one he sought for. In this case God has said, as He would to any who sought with the same perseverance and energy through toiling days and sleepless nights, 'Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'

It is much the same with ambition in any line. If a man determines, wills, resolutely sets his whole mind and soul to rise to distinction in his profession, whether as a preacher, a lawyer, a politician, he will generally succeed in his purpose. He *may* fail, but he has taken the best means to ensure success, if he has made this one object the main, uppermost purpose of his life, for which he will sacrifice anything, bear anything, do anything, accept anything, stoop to anything, dare and be anything. If, in short, he is determined, bent on, wills strongly and perseveringly, that one thing, he will generally win the prize he has run for. It is as if Providence watching his untiring industry, his resolute efforts, said, 'Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'

But there is this to be said about the objects that we strive for and live for, namely, that we must set before ourselves distinctly what is our goal and our prize, and then be satisfied if by our strivings, and waitings, and self-denyings, we do actually win that prize—that one, and no other. Because it often happens that a man labours for one thing, and then is disappointed and dissatisfied because he has not gained some other thing. He has laboured to be a good, honest, clean-handed man ; and he is so. But he is sometimes half inclined to murmur because he is not also a successful man. He looks around him, and sees So-and-so, who has all his life been gathering, and striving, and saving, and labouring day and night in pursuit of gain—and perhaps not very scrupulous about how a shilling came into his pocket, provided it was a genuine shilling—and

he says, 'Look there at that low, uneducated fellow, who would do anything to succeed, and how successful he has been in life; while I am still very much where my fathers were!' Very well! It is all just and right. He has got what *he* worked for, and you have what *you* worked for. You will hardly say you have made the worse bargain of the two. You would hardly change places, and *characters*, with that man—or at least the time will come when you certainly would not do so. So, do not be inconsistent in your expectations. But having chosen your path, follow it steadily, strongly, fairly; and take gratefully, and with a satisfied heart that which you strove for and have won.

And so another man loves peace, security, and comfort. Very well; if his character requires this, or his taste prefers it, let him seek, enjoy, and cherish it. But do not let him grumble because he does not possess those prizes which can only be won by war, and strife, and struggle. He must give up his peace, and the joys of peace, to gain these other. If he thinks the prize not worth the cost, let him be satisfied to go without the prize, and keep the cost. But let him not think to have both, or murmur that he has not.

As with material things, so with spiritual—with what bears upon a man's moral and religious character. Here, too, the strength of a man's determination and desire almost decides his destiny. If he does not desire earnestly and strongly to be a really good man, he has a poor chance of becoming so. That poor, cold, languid, half wish, that is all that many men's religion ever rises to, is seldom worth anything. At any rate, it cannot lift him into the higher regions of the religious life. Nay, it cannot defend him against strong temptations, or bring him comfort in trying hours. It cannot bear him through the deep waters and dark passages of life. It has very little likeness or relation to the great subject it tries feebly to touch. The almost invisible flame of

devotion and aspiration that burns so low in such hearts, how little like it is to that of David: 'As the hart panteth!' This feeble resolution to be honest—how different from Job's vow: 'Till I die, I will not remove mine integrity!' This poor half faith, that only wishes it might believe, and often forgets even to wish—what a contrast in the faith of Paul: 'I am persuaded that neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.' Among those who have left their mark upon the world, you will not find those who thought nothing worth much trouble, or that nothing mattered much. 'I know thee,' saith the Spirit, 'that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert.' Surely, any mistakes are better than this; *anything* better than *nothing*! Where there is any life, any substance, any strength, something may be made of it. Where there is *nothing*, nothing can be made. Weakness may lead to the worst forms of sin; and a strong, bold, unscrupulous villain may command more respect among his fellow-men than a poor, weak, vacillating, careless do-nothing, whom no man can count upon, no man can trust; who would be good if anybody would take the trouble to make him so; who does not love evil, does not choose it, does not wish for it, yet is continually falling into it; whose nature is altogether without bone or sinew; and who, like the vapours of the upper air, is moulded into any form that a passing wind may determine.

The words of our text were not, however, a reward for, or a seal upon, a line of action or a quality of character; they were spoken as an answer to a prayer. And they are still the answer to thousands of prayers that rise from earth to heaven, not merely because they are strong, or persevering, or earnest, or the most determined ones. Our prayers must be such as God will approve, or, however determined, He will not meet them

with this answer. Our prayers are uttered in ignorance, but they are granted or denied in wisdom. They rise out of the darkness, but the answer comes out of the light. We know not what we ask; but He knows, and often grants it by denying it.¹

Indeed, so little do we know of what would be good for us, so little of our own weaknesses and tendencies, so little of the dangers, and possibilities that lie strewn thickly round us, that I often feel I dare not pray for anything but for God's blessing. We are *safe* there, with our eyes shut, with thick darkness around us; seeing nothing, we may trust everything. But when we venture to specify, to ask this or that, then we speculate upon our own knowledge, and take the consequences upon ourselves; and here we venture beyond the depth of our knowledge. What we ask for may look like a blessing, may look very beautiful, very dear, safe to be desired, greatly to be enjoyed; but we see only the outward appearance of the boon. If granted to our prayer, it may turn out to be the very opposite of all that it appears. We see only a part; dare we take upon ourselves the whole? We ask in ignorance, but we shall suffer in knowledge. We venture to specify a blessing, and it may turn out to be a curse. It is safer to pray, 'Be it unto me as Thou wilt; only keep me near to Thee, safe with Thee, in thine arms, in thy ways, among thy people, in thy light. Bless me, even me also, oh my Father! Lord, Thou knowest. Remember me, and visit me!'

It is a safe guide in our wishes and pursuits in life, that they should always be such as we can ask God's blessing on; always such that He will be ready to say to us, 'Be it unto thee as thou wilt.' We shall never go far wrong if we try for this. And then, having settled what shall be our objects, let us set to the pursuing of them with a will; not languidly desiring,

¹ See Miss Procter's poem called, 'Strive, Wait, and Pray.'

not waiting for something to happen, not going easily and comfortably to work, as if nothing on this earth were worth straining a muscle for, as if there were sixty hours in the day instead of twenty-four, and as if work were made only to be looked at instead of to be done. But let us look at the work that stands waiting for us, like workmen—strip to it, lay to the oar, ply the weapon. Let men say, as they see us facing our task, ‘He looks as if he meant to do it.’ Let us feel that it is worth doing, and let us resolve to do it *as if* it were worth it.

And as to this particular work which we have before us as moral beings, there is this consoling consideration, that any man may do it; only, he must resolve he *will* do it. It must not be a matter of wish, but of will. Christ does not say, ‘Be it as thou wishest,’ but, ‘as thou *wilt*.’ The battle is to the brave, the determined, the resolute, the aspiring. All who make it their first purpose to be honest, true, upright men, Christians in deed as well as name, may be what they resolve to be. It requires no genius, no ability, no superior education, no superhuman strength of character, to be a good man. It only requires the *will* to act according to Christ’s law, and live according to his spirit. Christ did not grant the prayer of the woman because she was so able in argument, but because she was so steady in her faith, so resolute in her purpose, so persevering in her prayer, so full of a spirit that he felt kindred to his own—a spirit fitted to make her one of the bravest of his disciples.

How strange that we should be reading of this woman now, and drawing our lessons of religion and morality from her morning adventure with the Prophet who had wandered over the border from Galilee! How little she thought that the northern barbarians would, eighteen hundred years after, be listening to her story, and dwelling on the words spoken to her by that Son of David!

Let us try to win the answer which that woman won among the fields and byways of Syria ; and let us remember that it can only be won by the same means—by faith, earnestness, and perseverance. Do not let us be among the weak, wandering, vacillating, who only *wish*, but have not iron enough in them to harden their wishes into a *will*. Let us will strongly and wisely, and we may hope to be among those happy, 'willing' ones to whom our Lord, as he watches their persevering efforts and listens to their earnest prayers, at length returns that answer of peace and joy, 'Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'

THE VOICES OF THE DEAD.

'Being dead, he yet speaketh.'—HEBREWS xi. 4.

BEING dead.' Our first natural thought about a man when we hear he is dead, is that he is gone; that he and the world have parted, said 'Good-night to each other; that his work here is finished; that he has played out his part, and said his say, and that he has passed away into the silent land; and we on earth, who linger yet behind him, will see his face and hear his voice no more.

With many—with the bulk of men—that is just so. They pass away like a dream of the night. Their place knows them no more. They sink away out of sight, the wave rolls over them, and they are forgotten. But the words of our text tell us it is not always so. A man may die, and yet not have passed at once and for ever from the scene he moved in. Though dead, he may still live; though silent in the grave he may still speak.

When the sun sinks below the summer horizon, and goes to lighten up another hemisphere, we see indeed his orb no more; but he has left a glory behind, on the clouds and on the sky, which still reflects and speaks of him. The sun is gone. Yes; but though set, he is still shining. And so it is with the master-spirits of mankind, the truly great among the sons of men. They sink away out of our sight—though in reality it is only to go up higher—and we say they are gone;

their work is done, and they have laid down to their rest. But no, they are not quite gone yet. They have left a trail of light behind them which speaks not only of their past greatness, but shines yet in blessing on their fellow-men. They have left the mark of their footsteps on the world, which those who come after them may seek out and follow. Their living voices, indeed, will fall upon our ear no more ; but they are not silent. Though dead, they yet speak ; and speak too, perhaps, with greater power than when they lifted up their living voice among the living. The great thinkers and writers of our race, in all ages and in all lands—the statesmen, philosophers, poets, orators—men whose deeds have been their monuments, whose voices have been trumpets, whose words have been fire, whose very living has been a power and an influence upon the generations following them,—what voices have such men left behind them—voices speaking still from the silence of their graves, voices whose echoes will never die as long as it is useful they should live !

Does it not give to a man a sort of immortality even upon earth, if he can thus, on the one hand, live in thought with the past generations of men, and, on the other hand, transmit his own best thoughts to the coming ages ? He is no longer a passing insect of an hour, perishing when the cold and darkness fall around him ; he is now one of a family that never dies while the human race shall live. He is in communion with the great spirits of the past who went before him, and he is in communion with the listening spirits of the future who shall live after him. He is no stranger to any portion, to any generation, of his race ; he is a man of all times and of all lands.

Look at the history of our own country, and recall the names of those men who in other times, by their lives, their deeds, their sacrifices, their words, their watchings, and their blood, have made England what

she is. These men are not forgotten in the land for which they lived and died. Their voices are still listened to, and, being dead, they yet speak to us. In our public debates, in our silent studies, in our solitary meditations, we point to their characters, we quote their words, we dwell upon their sacrifices, as though they were but of yesterday, and were still among us.

And so it is with the sacred volume, the book of books. That volume is a collection of the voices of the dead, the mighty ones of old, the prophets, historians, poets, rulers, warriors, and thinkers, who lived in the morning hours of man's life upon the earth, and held holy communion with their God. Yes, though dead, they yet speak to us. Their voices come rolling through the long interval of ages louder and more powerful than if they were of yesterday. Sometimes we know not who it is that speaks—the very name of the speaker has been forgotten—but his voice is yet floating on the air. The past is speaking to the present, the east is calling aloud to the west, the ancient to the modern; the prophet of Israel in that old Syrian land, girt with his shirt of camel's hair, hot from the dust of the desert, speaks to the busy, luxurious, or toiling Englishman dwelling four thousand years afterwards, in a barbarous western island, whose very existence was to him unknown. Yes, above all books, this one may be called the book of the voices of the dead. And the dead whose voices there speak, and we the living who now hear and listen to these voices, are thus bound together as members of one great human family, as children of the same God.

Think of Moses—the first and greatest man of the ancient world! The ruler of the people—the nurse of a nation in its infancy—the priest, the lawgiver, the leader, the counsellor, the mediator between God and his wayward, rebellious children! A man whose figure, seen through the mists of ages, looks like one of those

mighty statues of Egyptian granite, hewn by some giant sculptor of the olden time, but even yet standing amid the hot sands of the desert to be gazed upon and wondered at by long-after generations of men. The voice of Moses comes to us in these distant ages, like the rolling of far-off thunder, dying away for ever and yet speaking still.

And David! the shepherd king, the sweet singer of Israel! How *he* speaks to us! Who, but one, ever spoke to living men with a voice like David? Who ever left such a voice behind him? A voice of power, a melody speaking to a thousand generations—reverberating through the distance of ages. His harp-strings are sounding still, with a power and majesty no other instrument of music has ever attained—rejoicing, triumphing, exulting, or imploring, supplicating and repenting, or lifting the cry of the soul in love, trust, and adoration. Who ever sang like David and his fellow-psalmists? Who ever left such an echoing trail of sound and thought lingering on the ear of coming ages? For four thousand years has man been familiar with their voices. How many thousands more will roll away before those voices will be listened to no more!

And Paul too—he who, more perhaps than any other, has impressed his own thoughts, ideas, and imaginations upon the Christianity of the present day—is he dead? Does not he yet speak? Surely upon his grave no more fitting epitaph could be inscribed than these very words that we are dwelling on: 'Though dead, he yet speaketh.'

But there was another, greater than Paul or David, to whom, and the story of the memories that gather round him, these words apply with a peculiar force. They might have been written in letters of lightning above his cross. Is not he still speaking to men? Aye, not even upon the mountain-side of Galilee—not in the temple, when denouncing the Scribes and Pharisees—

not when addressing listening multitudes, or standing before the silent sepulchre—did that voice speak with a greater power, or over so wide a sweep, as it has since done in far-distant ages and far-distant lands. That voice has gained solemnity and power by the centuries through which it has been rolling. That form and face have now a halo of mysterious glory round them, dim and nebulous, like the sun behind a half-transparent cloud, which exalts even his earthly likeness into something approaching the divine. Jesus of Nazareth, when speaking face to face with the fishermen of Galilee, was less to them than Christ crucified was to his deserted disciples after the resurrection—less indeed than he has often been to millions who have looked upon their unseen Lord only with the eye of faith; and from the sepulchre of Calvary, more even than from the hills of Galilee, does that voice speak to these distant ages among which our lives have fallen.

But in thus speaking of this great subject, I am regarding it only in its larger aspects. I am soaring among the clouds and the mountain-tops; but there are valleys as well as mountains, and *we* walk among the valleys. Yet these words of our text apply to ourselves as well as to the heroes and giants of our race, though in another sense, and with a humbler application. I mean that we too speak to our fellow-men long after the moment when we bid them farewell and vanish from their sight. With most of us, or at least with many of us, there are some we leave behind us who will not only feel our loss, but will bear our mark. They will not be exactly what they would have been if we had never lived. We shall in some degree have influenced their life, have determined their future, have pointed their course, have removed stumbling-blocks out of their path, or perhaps, placed some there. They will remember words that we have spoken, things that we have done, kindnesses that we have rendered, wrongs that we have

committed, rights that we have upheld. If, in what we have said and done and been while among them we have made truth plainer, virtue more easy, right more clear, duty more commanding, all that is good and beautiful more holy and attractive in their sight—then our words, and deeds, and lives, will speak still to them of these things from the grave. If we have done the opposite to all this—if we have made the right more difficult and the wrong more easy, or if we have done or said anything to confound their sense of what is right and what is wrong—if we have weakened their faith, or darkened their hopes, or quenched their aspirations—then we still shall speak from the silence of the grave, but it will not be with a voice of blessing.

Who can tell how far, how wide, how long, this silent voice may be heard—this voice of the dead still falling on the ears of the living? We influence our children, neighbours, friends, listeners, and fellow-workers. They will influence their children, their friends, and others. From circle to circle, from heart to heart, from father to son, from generation to generation, this silent power may be transmitted and prolonged, none knowing whence it comes or when it first sprang into being; but unquestionably there, felt still in the lives, the joys, the sorrows, or the sins of the third or fourth generations of our children's children. It is a thought which well may make us pause and ponder, and even tremble—the thought of how far the influence of our words or lives may affect future generations of men who never heard our names or read one page of our little history.

This influence may be for good, it may be for evil, but it *will* be for one or the other. Let us endeavour, let us strive earnestly, let us watch, let us pray, that it may be for good—that it may make richer, and not poorer, the friends or the strangers who feel it. Let no one be able to say, when we are gone, that it would have been better if we had never lived—that those who

come after would have been happier if we had not come before. Let our prayer be, that any influence of evil that may have gone forth from us may be buried in the silence of our grave. But let our prayer also be, that some voices of sweet music—soft and low, it may be, and heard only by those who loved us, and who may pause to listen for them—may still speak lovingly, pleasantly, wisely, from the other side of life's borderland; and that those who have laid us in dust, as they turn away to tread again the busy highways of life, may pronounce a blessing on our name, and say one to another as they go: 'Though dead, he yet speaketh.'

PRAYERS.

I.

FATHER! may this hour be blessed to every heart that in earnestness and sincerity has been looking heavenward. Father! we know that the brightness of thy Spirit shines into human hearts as surely as the sun shines on the world which is our present dwelling-place. We thank Thee for this light of the Spirit. We thank Thee, too, for the outward blessings which daily fall upon us, for the flowers that bloom along life's way, the mercies that crowd our pathway. As Thou sendest sunshine upon us, teach us how we may help to pass it on to others. May we never cast shadows in the way of our fellow-travellers in life's way. May we never add a grain to the weight of another man's burden. May we never, by a careless word, inflict an unnecessary wound. May we never, by a proud demeanour or a chilling expression, close and darken a heart that is longing to open its wants, or its sorrows, or its longings, to some listening ear. May we rejoice with those who rejoice, and forget our own cares and desires while entering into and helping theirs. May we ever feel the reality of thy Fatherly presence, and of the unseen world where we hope to know Thee better; and may the sunshine from that future world shine upon and gladden *this*—a sunshine that no cloud can utterly darken, for it shines upon us from a region that no cloud can reach.

Now may thy blessing go forth with us as we go forth from this place. Guard us from all evil ; strengthen us in all weakness ; enlighten us in all darkness ; be our Guide along the shortening pathway of life ; and at length let us lie down, trusting and fearless, at thy feet. AMEN.

II.

O THOU who didst send thy beloved Son into the world to seek and to save that which was lost, and to point the heavenward path to him who had forgotten it, we beseech Thee to make us more worthy to call ourselves his disciples, and more earnest in our desires truly to take his yoke upon us. Pour down his spirit into our hearts. May he manifest himself unto us—reveal himself—teach us to know him—make us feel both his presence and his power. May we be his, not in name only, but in spirit and in truth. May his words, his life, his example, be ever before us, to guide, to support, to strengthen us in our upward way. May the remembrance of his obedience and humility break the neck of our pride and wilfulness, and bend our hearts to accept thy will. May the example of his meekness and patience teach us to bear with the little faults and provocations of our fellow-men. May his lowliness make us humble. May his courage make us brave. Looking to the great cross he bore, may we, each one of us, take up our little cross, and bear it bravely, cheerfully, trustingly. And may we so confess him before men, that hereafter he may not be ashamed to confess us before his Father and the angels. AMEN.

III.

FATHER in heaven ! unseen, unknown, yet ever present with thy children ; ever filling us with life ; ever watching over our stumbling steps ; listen to our prayer, that Thou wouldst answer our wants, even

more than our requests ; that Thou wouldst shield us from our dangers, and forgive us our transgressions, and fill our hearts with the love of all good, and weaken and subdue for us all the power of evil. May those who are standing on the threshold of life pause as they enter on it, and think well what life is, and what it may be made ; what vast opportunities, what sacred duties, what boundless possibilities, are there ; what a field, too, for manly and ennobling action, and for the growth of growing spirits ; where those who strive will be strengthened, and where those who seek light shall find it ; but where the careless will be passed by, and the idlers will be forgotten, and the unprofitable servant cast out from the companionship of the good.

We pray for young and old, that thy mercies, as they descend upon us daily, silently as dew, may not, in that silence, be unnoticed and forgotten ; but that while we thank Thee for thy greater blessings, we may not pass by the less. Let the little lights and the little flowers be gratefully enjoyed and gathered, and let us thank Thee even for the trials that gently chasten us ; and for the wrestling angels that strengthen as they strive with us ; and for those daily crosses that remind us of the yoke, though it be a light and easy one, that we bear. All these may we receive, not as the barren rocks receive the rain, but with grateful and responding hearts, thus hallowing every passing hour and circumstance by recognizing thy mark upon them all. AMEN.

IV.

O LEADER of the blind, and Light of those that grope in darkness, we pray that Thou wouldst in mercy guide thy servants now before Thee, as they journey along their earthly course. In our darkest night, may thy pillar of fire point out our way ; and in the sunshine and the glare of life, may the over-

shadowing cloud remind us of the presence of our God. May we go on our way, be it smooth or rough, calm or stormy, like mariners obeying their compass, looking only where thy finger of Duty points, awaiting thy signals, and biding thy time. May promises go with us, like attending angels, forever whispering in our hearts of the rest and the peace that remain for the people of God. Thus may we journey on, like children seeking the home of their Father—like heaven-bound pilgrims travelling towards the goal of their worship; and at length may we meet each other, and the loved ones who are gone before, and the spirits of the great and good of all nations and all times, where tears shall be forgotten and wrongs forgiven, where we shall sit down ~~at the feet of Jesus~~ *together* before the throne of God. AMEN.

V.

HEAVENLY FATHER, in these quiet moments of our spirit's life, when we have shut the door and are alone with Thee, grant that we may seek earnestly, and not in vain, that strength, that light, that inspiration, which is only to be found near Thee. And when from this holy Presence we go forth again to the scene of our labours, our duties, and our trials, may we feel that Presence ever with us still. Be nearest to us when we need Thee most; and may we hear most clearly the whispers of thy voice when dangers and trials lie most thick around us. When we are happy, may we rejoice with trembling. When we are strong, may we work as for Thee, with our whole heart and mind and spirit. When we are weak and wounded, may we lean on Thee, and in patience wait, till the power of action calls us again to labour. When clouds and darkness gather around us, may we endeavour to pierce the screen, and seek the light which we know lies beyond it. And when the leng-

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